

# FICTION AND THE READING PUBLIC IN INDIA

*Editor:*

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH



UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE



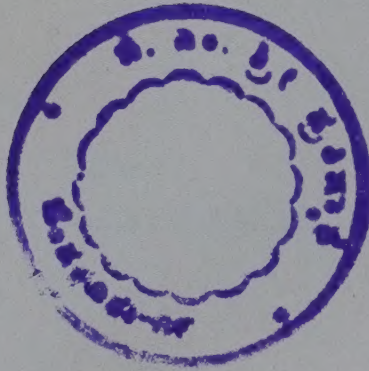


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*Editor:*

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH

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UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE  
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TO •  
PROFESSOR S. V. RANGANNA  
PROFESSOR K. ANANTHARAMIAH  
AND  
PROFESSOR A. N. MOORTHY RAO  
IN GRATITUDE





## PREFACE

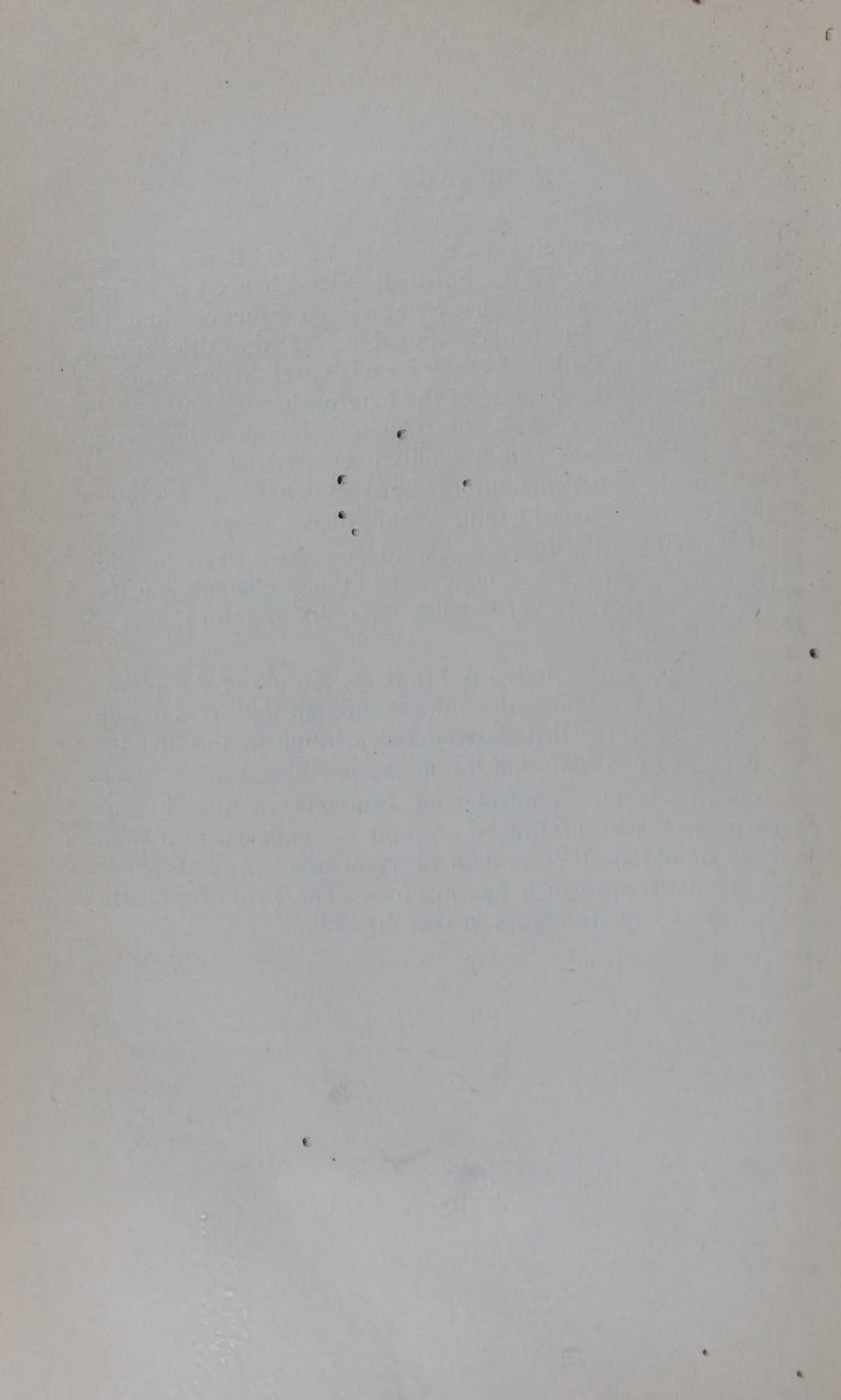
THE Editor is grateful to the Lala Lajpat Rai Centenary Committee and Dr K. L. Shrimali, Vice-Chancellor, Mysore University, for making the Seminar on 'Fiction and the Reading Public in India' possible. If the title sounds pretentious to a reader of Q. D. Leavis's well-known work on a similar subject it is because of the heterogeneous nature of the present undertaking. Also, this is but a beginning in the attempt to acquaint ourselves with a wholly uncharted territory. The Editor thanks the contributors, most of whom were present at the Seminar at considerable inconvenience to themselves.

The publication of papers would not have been possible without a grant from the University Grants Commission, for which the Department of English offers its grateful thanks to the Commission.

I must not forget to thank Mr K. A. Korula of the Wesley Press, Mysore, for seeing the volume through the Press despite numerous pressures that delayed the printing in the first few months. His consideration for me is something I value much.

The Research Scholars and Students of the English Department have encouraged me and my colleagues to think that we should at all costs fight for standards. And thanks to them standards are worth fighting for. The Seminar and the published papers are efforts in that direction.

C.D.N.





## INTRODUCTION

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH

THE Lala Lajpat Rai Centenary Committee wrote to the Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University would be interested in arranging a Seminar on some aspect of literature to commemorate the centenary of Lala Lajpat Rai's birth in November 1965. Dr Shrimali in his kindness passed the letter on to the English Department for proposals. And the Seminar on 'Fiction and the Reading Public in India' was its outcome. The following is an extract from the Editor's address\* at the inaugural session:

For the members of the English Department this Seminar is quite an important event as all our guests except for a solitary black sheep, are writers, not professed teachers. And that is no accident but a considered decision of one of those rare moments of introspection which even teachers may achieve. I shall quote from a British teacher of mid-19th century, a Reverend A. J. Scott as he seems to express my present mood so adequately:

'The highest teaching can never be of him whose chief business is to teach. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were resorted to not because they made teaching their business, but because they were believed to make philosophy their business. . . . He who learns from one occupied in learning, drinks of a running stream. He who learns from one who has learnt all he is to teach, drinks the green mantle of the stagnant pool'.

Gentlemen, your presence here these four days is a very welcome opportunity for us; it makes the stagnant pool flow and thus aids the function of literature. It is Henry Sidgwick of Cambridge who said 'one great advantage of Literature as an instrument of education is that it supplements a teacher's defects so much'.

\* Except for the first few paragraphs which are omitted here the entire address is reproduced in the hope that it will serve as an introduction to the papers presented by the participants.

Now how does literature supplement the defects of bad teaching? A vast majority of men are alive only partially, because so much of our life is often an evasion of ourselves and the world around. And it is trite to say that art and literature offer stimulus, awaken us to life and to activity and give us fresh insights and reveal life's possibilities as nothing else can. Not for nothing did Mr. I. A. Richards say that 'if the arts decline, a biological calamity of the first order will have occurred'. If after successive quoting I may be forgiven another quotation, this time from one of the supreme novelists of our time, D. H. Lawrence: 'it is the way our sympathies flow and recoil that determines the quality of our lives'. And poetry and fiction are a sure means of making sympathy flow in the veins or even recoil when it becomes necessary. It is in that sense that one can appreciate the claim that with Jane Austen novel writing was *an act of hospitality*. But it is often a treacherous host. For, gone are the days when one could say without fear of contradiction that reading maketh a full man. All of us assembled here, at least, know how few of us read the right books let alone read them as they ought to, be read. The hidden persuaders work havoc here as elsewhere. Take an advertisement of a Book Society with an impressive array of celebrated names constituting its advisory committee. Does it mean that even big names can be bought over by periodicals and reviews? The advertisement reads:

'The Book you read is often a guide to your character. The Book Fraternity will help you to get those books you should have on your bookshelf'.

Books, of course, have come to mean largely books of fiction and reading in most cases is nothing but fiction reading. Now fiction is a product of leisure, not the leisure enjoyed by the peasant in an agricultural community where agriculture was not merely a means of living but a way of life. The modes of entertainment in an agricultural community were communal, not individual. But the industrial age brought in its train mass production, and mass production brought labour saving devices which resulted in fewer hours of work for the individual who was thus left with more leisure but also a greater deadening of the sensibility, for work in a factory is far from being creative—it is soul-killing. With the loss of the organic society and the



communal mode of entertainment leisure can, and often has, become, an intolerable boredom for the individual who now stands isolated from the rest of his fellowmen until at last he is threatened with alienation from himself and Fiction, that is, a large part of it, is the product of such an over-worked society, though it is also perhaps the most potent instrument devised by technological man for those of his kind caught in this boredom. The more robust men in such a society may choose to drink, dance and sing jazz while the weak of limb may go to see a film, or shuffle cards in those gambling dens euphemistically called the clubs. The empty of purse in this category may stay back at home and listen to the commercial radio and the juke-box and, for a more vicarious satisfaction and extended titillation of the senses, indulge in what Coleridge so early but so prophetically called, 'a sort of beggarly day-dreaming'—that is what fiction-reading meant to Coleridge and has come to mean to most of us—largely because of the common run of fiction writer and his reading public.

Where you once found in cultivated homes the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Gita* or Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Emerson and Carlyle you now have the *Reader's Digest*, *Life*, *Time*, *Femina*, *Woman's Own* and Agatha Christie, Erle Stanley Gardner and James Bond stories or the opposite numbers of these in our fourteen languages—but the pattern is the same and the impact, same too. Industrialization and urbanization have bracketed the university graduate and the factory hand with regard to their modes of entertainment at any rate, and one wonders whether it is not simply in matters of material comfort that the Engineering graduate who is a foreman, or the Arts or the Science graduate, who is a member of the Indian Administrative Service, or for that matter many a university teacher, continues to stand completely apart from the ill-paid manual worker. For at least here the manual worker has no grievance against his social betters. Even in the West with almost three hundred years of fiction writing, so much fiction has lost touch with the intelligence of the age. If in the West affluence and boredom have driven the people to substitute-living, in our country and in the economically backward countries of Asia and Africa the stimulus to writing no less than to reading fiction might be

poverty, social injustice, governmental inefficiency, exploitation by the rich and the powerful—these have led us to seek refuge in fiction as in the film making for continual 'downward expansion in the satisfaction of taste'. While widespread affluence and the resultant conformity of the individual and a pervasive standardization of society in the West are driving the western novelist in search of new themes, in the East, like his business counterpart who comes in search of markets for his exports and investments, the best fruits of such an endeavour are a Kipling, an E. M. Forster, an Edward Thompson and others much less distinguished than these. Is this the reason, one sometimes wonders, why foreigners like Patrick White and Randolph Stow of Australia, Chenua Achebe of Nigeria and Naipaul of West Indies, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Santha Rama Rau of India seem to find considerable response from English and American readers? An attempt has to be made in this Seminar as to how far our novelists in the various Indian languages have acquired a world-view of life and literature and how such a view shapes their sensibility—and more important, how that sensibility gets expressed in imaginative terms in fiction.

T. S. Eliot who complained of increasing secularization of the English novel since Defoe thought that even outside England the novel came to an end with Flaubert and Henry James. Others joined the fray when they spoke of Joyce and Proust as bringing the novel to its grave, while Professor Lionel Trilling of America thinks it can only die by following the laws of its own development. It will not die, if as one of us fortunately present here (Mr Raja Rao) said at a Seminar on Fiction organized by the Sahitya Akademi in Delhi that while the Novel had its origin in gossip it grew to maturity with the questioning of gossip and made further fruitful explorations when the questioner was questioned. That is the position in which we find the novel today in the West, though one often notices especially in a large chunk of fiction written in the English language that the writers are making major art out of minor material, their success being one of technique rather than the touch of life. At any rate, so many of their writers are erected into major status by critics and reviewers in Sunday papers a large number of whom know little history



and less geography and this, aided by a publishing trade into which has entered some of the shrewdest money-making talent, has perfected fiction-publishing into a major industry and a major item of export from English-speaking countries such as England, America and Australia. Looking at things around, one suspects if some publishers don't descend so low as to have their books banned for obscenity to boost their sales. For Fiction is the main stay of so many publishers.

My concern now, indeed, the object of the Seminar, is not to tell the novelist what he should write or highlight and what he should ignore or relegate into the background. I am less fatuous than that. It is to understand what to each of us writing and reading of fiction in our different languages, at least in the six languages represented here—Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and English—constitutes a good novel. Is it plot-construction? story? characterization? realism? ideas? technique? or is it enlarging of the frontiers of human consciousness so as to make for a civilized mentality? For there must be some sort of general agreement and shared assumptions among all of us reading fiction in different languages. Approximately at least we must mean the same things when we call a novel good or bad. That's to search for criteria, valid and acceptable not in a European context but in the framework of India though I should hasten to add standards are international, not national or provincial. But one can ignore one's own tradition at one's peril especially when the Indian has his veritable ocean of stories—from the stories of the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Epics, the Yogavasista, and the Jataka tales, not to speak of the folk tales and romances in our various regional languages to the cluster of village stories, (every village has a *Sthala Vriksha* and a *Sthala Purana*)—all these together with an absorbing variety of land and life, so many sources of interest so far neglected and so many areas of consciousness yet unvisited, have today to be amalgamated into a modern sensibility. Once we acquire a vision and a sensibility, the technique does not matter—for content will shape its own form. As Croce said, the content must be formed and the form filled.

How do we seek to inculcate standards in the young for, through them it is that we can hope to reach larger groups of

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readers? That is precisely the task of criticism and if I may presume to say so, of teaching literature in a university department. For to study literature at this level is to study it critically or not at all.

To the extent we in this Seminar have reached some understanding of the need for some vaguely defined common criteria of judgment in fiction or attempt an appreciation of the difficulties that beset us in the formulation of standards of judgment have we succeeded in our discussions and found a direction. What, if any, is the nature of the difficulty in judging a novel? Is it that we have no novels which can set a standard or is it that our languages being largely languages of high flown poetry are not yet ready to catch the breath of daily life and with it the rhythms of spoken language which alone can register any response from the sensitive reader? Or, is it that we can't articulate our responses sharply without risking certain social relationships? Or, is it a question of the deplorable absence of a healthy and responsible criticism? I say so because only such a criticism can help to revitalise the Indian novel and make it an object of serious, adult interest. The novel, it has been claimed, is the one bright book of life. If so it is a potent weapon and we should learn and share with the young in our turn as to what constitutes life, what makes for life and what makes against it in a work of art. For fiction, said James, is not make-believe. To consider it so is betrayal of its sacred office, a terrible sin. We need to have this faith in the function of fiction and we need all that wisdom that is implicit in it in the effort to order life on the individual as well as the national plane, by forging what Joyce called the conscience of the race in the smithy of the writer's soul. Only then will fiction matter and we must make fiction matter, for to do that is to make life matter.



## A NOTE ON LALA LAJPAT RAI

M. TARINAYYA

‘MEN like Lalaji cannot die so long as the sun shines in the Indian sky’. In these words Mahatma Gandhi paid his tribute to Lajpat Rai. A hundred years have gone by and he lives—the memory of his life’s mission and the manner of his death. He gave his blood that his country might live in liberty.

Born as he was in a mud hut in the small village of Dhudike, in the Punjab, he had none of the privileges of wealth, position or much of university education. But India was in his blood; the sun and the soil of the land nourished his body and mind; from his father came to him the gift of passion for united Indian nationhood; from his mother, the basic spirituality of his nature and the genius for constructiveness, and when he was hardly twenty four, plunged into the main stream of the struggle for Independence. For him, as for Gandhi, means and ends were indistinguishable; and like the Mahatma, he gave his message of fearlessness and absolute integrity, in public life: If ‘our motives are pure and lofty, if our weapons are those of high character, self-sacrifice and noble deeds, and if in our march onward we are guided by that single-minded devotion to duty which alone can bring success to our arms, we need fear no failure, no repulses and no mishaps’. ‘Holiday patriots’ as he described many of them and their hankering after power and privilege oblivious of the poverty, ignorance and misery of the masses, sometimes disillusioned him; but he would not be disheartened. When politics repelled him he devoted his energies to social reform, education, and industrial progress—activities as essential for national progress as political activity. He was the founding father of the D. A. V. College and played a significant part in the establishment of the Punjab National Bank. Among his other creations were Tilak School of Politics, Dwarakadas Library, the National College at Lahore, the Gulabdevi Hospital for consumptive patients, and the establishment of

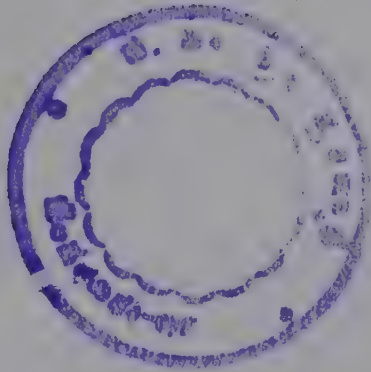
several orphanages for the protection and care of helpless children. But the call of his country was irresistible and he could not keep away from political activity for long. 'The rope of the hangman, the axe of the executioner or the shot of the gunner,' he says, did not deter him even as the pettiness and meanness of the self-seeking politician could not. These only made his desire for national struggle 'keener and stronger'. 'Banishments and deportation, imprisonment and torture, confiscation'—the usual weapons of the imperial government proved ineffectual. One has to read Nehru's (*Autobiography*) reference to Lala Lajpat Rai's deportation and the anti-Simon demonstration, to feel the impact of all that he lived and sacrificed his life for.

A younger generation to whom Gandhi and Nehru, Lajpat Rai and Tilak are only names in the immemorial history of India, is growing up and in the foreword Nehru wrote to a book by Tendulkar on Gandhiji, he expressed the fear—perhaps rightly—that Gandhiji's name might in course of time be added to the pantheon of Hindu gods and be forgotten. Perhaps the surest means of reminding ourselves of the life and work of one of our greatest men is to make available for reading and reflection some of his writings: *Autobiography (Atmakatha)*, *Call to Young India* (a collection of his speeches and writings), *The Political Future of India* (in which he tells the British Government that India dislikes its autocratic, bureaucratic and antiquated government and its educational system), *Ideals of Non-Co-operation and Other Essays* (in which he explains in a clear and convincing way the basic principles and the philosophy of Gandhiji's non-co-operation movement and answers the charges of impracticability levelled against it by moderate politicians of his time), *India's Will to Freedom* (a collection of his writings and speeches on non-violence and non-co-operation), *Unhappy India* (a reply to the 'rash and vile generalizations' of 'yellow journalism'—a book called *Mother India* by Miss Katherine Mayo), *Young India* (an interpretation and history of the National Movement in India).

It is perhaps a happy coincidence that the Lala Lajpat Rai Centenary Celebrations Committee thought of an educational centre like Mysore University, and the Department of English Studies to organise a Seminar, for Lajpat Rai, as he tells us in



*The Problem of National Education in India*, 'the study of educational institutions, educational ideals and methods has been one of the passions of my life. In foreign countries also I have devoted a substantial part of my time and energy to the study of educational questions always with a view to their adaptation to the needs of India'. I said a 'happy coincidence' since here, in the words of a distinguished visiting educationist, Professor William Walsh, 'the soul is schooled and made an intelligence.'



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## SOME THOUGHTS ON ENGLISH FICTION AND THE READING PUBLIC

BALAGOPAL VARMA

THE English novel is one of the results of the gradual democratization of Britain. Of all forms of literature, the novel is closest to the general reading public. Literary historians, in tracing the source of the novel form, are fond of recognising its origin in the medieval romances and Boccaccio's *Decameron* tales (14th century), perhaps in an attempt to lend it additional dignity by establishing its antiquity. They cite such examples as Malory's *Morte d' Arthur* (15th century), Lyly's *Eupheus* (16th century) and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (17th century) as early evidences of the existence of the English novel. But for all practical purposes, the novel as we understand the form today, made its appearance in England in the first half of the 18th century in the writings of Defoe and Richardson. They are the first among the important writers of England who did not adopt their plots from mythology, legend, history or previous literature. Thus they set in a trend towards realism and originality in subject and form. Their themes came close to the texture of the daily life and experience of the contemporary middle-class people.

The appearance of the novel form coincided with the emergence of the middle-class as the general reading public of England and the beginning of their growing influence on the literature of the country. Until 18th century the reading community consisted of the educated minority belonging mainly to the upper-class, and the authors had to depend upon the patronage of the aristocracy for their subsistence. But from that century onwards there has been a steady growth of the reading public. Of the several factors that contributed to this increase, the spread of literacy was undoubtedly the most important. Even though literacy was far from universal in the 18th century England, and an organised education system hardly existed, in the towns at least, semi-literacy was more common than illiteracy<sup>1</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> See Ian Watt: *The Rise of the Novel*: p. 38.

gradual break up of the rural life and the consequent urbanisation led to the growing influence of the shopkeepers and independent traders and brought them within the orbit of the middle-class structure. To those engaged in the middle-class occupations of commerce and administration, the ability to read became a necessary accomplishment. Until the 18th century, prose writings were mainly confined to religious tracts and sermons. This was to some extent the practice even in that century. Defoe wrote novels as well as pious works such as *Family Instructor*, while Richardson included moral and religious aims in his fiction. But the growing popularity of a secular prose was evident in the success enjoyed by the *Tatler* (1709) and the *Spectator* (1711) which more or less set the taste for secular prose reading. Addison, therefore, more than succeeded in his claim that through his periodicals, 'I shall endeavour as much as possible to establish among us a taste of polite writing'.<sup>2</sup> These periodicals stood for serious standards, and even though they may appear rather naive and jejune compared to modern critical codes, they developed in their readers certain critical standards and a taste for reading. By developing among their half a million readers<sup>3</sup> a taste for secular writing these periodicals greatly contributed to the popularity and development of the novel.

The growth of the reading public resulted in the decline of the patronage of literature by the aristocracy. For their subsistence, the authors began to look to the booksellers who, in their turn, had to depend upon the reading public. Johnson's famous letter to his patron, The Earl of Chesterfield wherein he expressed that he was 'unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a Patron, which Providence has enabled me to do for myself', may be looked upon as the declaration of the economic independence of the writer from aristocratic patronage. But then, the 18th century reading public was none too affluent and the high cost of printing made the price of books prohibitive. The rapid spread of the circulating libraries, however, to some extent compensated for the economic inability of the people to buy books. The main attraction in these libraries were novels, though other types of literature were also stocked by them<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *Spectator* 58.

<sup>3</sup> See Q. D. Leavis: *Fiction and The Reading Public*: p. 123.

<sup>4</sup> See Ian Watt: *The Rise of the Novel*: p. 43.



All told, even though it can hardly be compared to the mass reading public of today, the 18th century reading public was large enough to justify Johnson's reference to a 'nation of readers'.<sup>5</sup>

The expansion of the general reading public and the consequent growth of the publishers produced a new danger. The demand for fiction became the mainstay of the publishers, and when novels of quality were not forthcoming in sufficient numbers the publishers were obliged to encourage hack writers to satisfy the insatiable demand of the public. This danger increased in proportion to the increase in the number of the reading public especially in the latter half of the 19th century and in the 20th century. It is needless to elaborate here the corrupting influence of this form of cheap popular fiction. But until the present century their influence has never been very deep and widespread. By and large, until modern times, the taste of the reading public has mainly been nurtured by the major novelists that succeeded Defoe and Richardson.

The novels of Richardson were the immediate impetus that prompted Fielding into novel writing, and *Joseph Andrews* was a direct criticism of the exaggerated morality preached by Richardson in *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*. He made a claim for greater realism and a better understanding of human nature, and insisted that both the characters and incidents in a novel should be restricted to the bounds of probability<sup>6</sup>. His celebrated theory that the novel is a 'comic epic in prose' and his insistence that both, the writer and the critic must possess a 'good share of learning', were claims for a higher status for the new form of literature. Fielding, both through his novels and his theories on it (mainly embodied in the prefaces to his novels) cautioned the readers against the intrusion into that field of art by writers who lacked the equipment and the genius to be called artists. The novelists that came after Fielding have all, in one way or the other contributed towards the widening of the scope of the novel and through it towards the growth of taste of the reading public. Goldsmith in his *Vicar of Wakefield* established the possibility of a deeper and more intimate study of the characters in novels. Jane Austen's novels presented the picture of the respectable English country society, strictly dominated by convention.

<sup>5</sup> *Lives of the Poets*, ed. Hill: III, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Fielding: *Tom Jones*: Bk. VII, Ch. 1.

With subtle irony she exposed the absurdities as well as revealed the graces of this miniature world. Scott's picturesque historical novels glorified the romance and adventure of the bygone days. The novels of Dickens increased the social consciousness of its readers. Using humour and pathos he drew the attention of his readers to the evils that pervaded the complacent Victorian society. George Eliot in her novels included philosophic dissertations. Hardy introduced the tragic strain into fiction. Finding small cause to rejoice in the scheme of things, his comment on life was sombre. The novelists before Hardy developed their characters within the framework of their society. In Hardy's novels the mysteries of nature and the inscrutable destiny of man form the background for their characters and action.

In the 19th century with the further increase in popular literacy and the entry of the lower-class into the reading community, there was an appreciable growth in the reading public. This automatically led to a further encouragement of the publication of cheap fiction. It is estimated that around 1850 there were more than ninety<sup>7</sup> publishers in London that specialised in Penny-issue fiction that catered to the popular taste. All this caused the widening of the gap between the writings of the highbrow novelists and those of the class of writers who wrote to satisfy the public. But even then, the reading public were not beyond the influence of the major novelists like Jane Austen and Scott in the early part of the century, and Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Meredith and Hardy in the latter half. For one thing, these writers, unlike the highbrow novelists of the 20th century, were not beyond the understanding of the common reader. That many a cheap periodical of the last century thrived on the plagiarism of Dickens<sup>8</sup> goes to prove that Dickens had captured the imagination of the average reader. And Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay* (p. 157) describes how once, when Scott went to one of the homes of the London aristocracy, the servants requested to be allowed to stand in the hall to get a glimpse of the celebrated author.

In the 20th century we find the completion of the cleavage between the highbrow novelists and popular writers, as also between the readers of these two classes of fiction. The gap

<sup>7</sup> See Louis James: *Fiction for the working Man* Appendix II.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid: pp. 45-71.



between the two can hardly be bridged and the common reader of today can neither appreciate nor take interest in the major contemporary novelists. The causes for this can be traced to the trends in modern fiction, as well as the composition and attitude of the present reading public. The themes, treatment and style of the novelists of the previous ages were not beyond the comprehension of the middle class which constituted the majority among the readers of fiction. Further, those writers adhered to the social moral and religious codes of their times. They could identify themselves with the generally accepted beliefs and values on which a large section of the society acted. Their modern counterparts, however, have rejected all traditional beliefs and values and have had to create values of their own, taking nothing for granted. One of the results of this, is the disappearance of the traditional hero from contemporary fiction. The protagonist of a modern novel is quite often a frustrated, puzzled and isolated individual 'trying to establish his own personal supra-social codes'.<sup>9</sup> But the average readers with their materialistic values cannot identify themselves with the problems of the characters in fiction and hence have to strain their sensibility for a sympathetic understanding of them. In their characterisation, the 20th century novelists attempt a deeper understanding of the human psychology by analysing the innermost consciousness, bordering on the unconscious, of their characters. They look upon their art with much greater solemnity and are, in the words of Dr Leavis, the servants of 'a profoundly serious interest in life'.<sup>10</sup> If the trends in modern fiction as detailed above led to the isolation of the common readers from that form of art, the quality of modern life and the attitude of the readers, increased this isolation. For the encouragement of reading among the non-academic public, the most basic requirement is leisure, and that is a luxury ill-afforded by the majority. During the available limited hours of leisure, the people are hardly inclined to do any sustained and serious reading demanded by high brow fiction. What they look for is relaxation which is amply provided by the cinema, radio, television, a plethora of periodicals that offer a variety of interests from serialised stories to astrological predictions and popular fiction that flood the book market. The last mentioned

<sup>9</sup> Sean O' Faolain: *The Vanishing Hero*: p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *The Great Tradition*: p. 18.

include two varieties. One consists of the crime, sex and detective stories which offer the kind of entertainment required by the low brow reader and which enable him to escape for the moment the monotony of his hum-drum existence. The other variety consists of the novels of the so-called serious writers who claim to present a serious and honest picture of the contemporary man and his society. Such writers (John O'Hara, Nevil Shute, Grace Mettallus, Harold Robins to mention a few names) not only enjoy the benefits of an immediate and world wide sale of their books, but also, temporarily at least, become the subject of discussion in fashionable society get-togethers. However it is needless to mention that their popularity lasts only until the appearance of another book that can be much talked about. The reading of high brow fiction today is severely limited to the small group that represents the intelligentsia and the minority culture in a society. This form of fiction like all arts has become esoteric and gone beyond the reach of the majority of the reading public.

The attempt in this essay so far has been to interlink the development of the English novel and the growth of the English reading public. In the first half of the 18th century it was the receptivity of the reading public that made the appearance of the novel possible. In the later ages the novelists, in their turn, helped to develop the taste and sensibility of the readers. Thus the English reading public underwent a natural process of evolution. In India on the other hand, the appearance and development of the fiction-reading public was not a natural product of the literary and social milieu of the time. The reading of fiction was a habit that was super-imposed by an alien culture. It began with the coming of English into India and increased with the spread of English education in this country in the second half of the 19th century.

Therefore, the reading of English fiction in this country has to be examined partially in a historical context. Indians took to fiction as a part of their attempt to familiarise themselves with the language, style and manners of the ruling race. This implies two things. From the point of view of the Englishmen, it was an introduction of their literature to a subject race, Macaulay playing the major role in this process. We can therefore conclude that the literature exported to India was to some extent controlled. A result of this control was that no Penny-issue came into this



country in those days, that is, in the 19th century. From the point of view of the Indian reader, another inhibition functioned. He read the English novel—it was a filtered supply he got—with a view to improving himself in relation to a knowledge of the culture of his masters. This probably accounts for the taste of the educated Indian of those days for didactic literature. Among the English novelists, Scott, Dickens, Hardy and (perhaps to a lesser degree) Jane Austen enjoyed wide popularity in this country in the first half of this century. Although there may have been literary and critical justifications for this popularity, primarily it was caused by the educated Indian's enthusiasm to understand the English mind and master the English language. I may seem to over-emphasise the didactic motives of the Indian reader of English during the pre-independence days. Of course it cannot be claimed that the English novel was read only for instruction and never for delight. But a command of 'King's English', and the ability to use it well were considered desirable and useful accomplishments. And this formed the basic motive of the lay reader of English literature in India.

In Independent India the composition and taste of the English reading public underwent a radical change. The habit of reading English literature to improve one's language has become outdated; for, a good command of the English language is no more the primary motive of education today. This liberates the Indian reader from his basic inhibition, viz., the reading of English literature for instruction. An unfortunate, but perhaps inevitable, result of this liberation is that it deprives him of any tested standards to base his values on, and he readily falls a victim to the lure of the cheap popular fiction that floods the Indian book market. Today in India, as in England and elsewhere, the reading of high brow fiction (and in India, especially that of English fiction) has become restricted to the limited group that form the intelligentsia, while the thrillers and pseudo-intellectual sex novels have become the sustenance of the general reading public.

## SOME ASPECTS OF INDIAN RESPONSE TO FICTION IN ENGLISH

E. J. EKAMBARAM

WHEN a young publisher had brought out Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* in 1923 it sold dismally. Rather an unambitious first print of 2,000 copies presumably exhausted the market for the author. To the publisher's surprise, the demand for the book doubled the following year and doubled again the year after that. It is estimated that two and a half lakh copies were sold last year and it is now selling at the rate of five thousand a week. Certainly no serious effort of the publisher warranted such phenomenal sales, except that he made the book available in a new edition illustrated by twelve Gibran sketches of idealised nudes. When asked to guess who really buys *The Prophet*, the publisher wryly remarked: 'I haven't met five people who *read* Gibran. It must be a cult'.

Such is the sensational progress of the novel and its reading public during the last few decades in India. More than any other literary form, the novel has become a suitable literary container to reflect the contemporary situation from time to time. Through all sorts of publicity, the novel of today reaches a vast and often well-disposed reading public. It affects not only those who read it and those who read about it, but even those who have no direct knowledge of it. In these days of adaptations to multiple media, like cinema and radio, people who never read the novel may still be affected by it. Particularly when we consider the number of novels, reviews and critical articles, published in popular magazines, we may well pause to inquire into such important changes as the relation between fiction and the reading public in India, the expectations of the reader, the aims and objects of the novelist, the reasons for the popularity of certain novels, and their possible literary values for us.

During the classical times in India, the literary public was not a mere reading public, in the modern sense. Vastly, it was an elite body of people endowed with certain qualities of mind and heart. It had the quality of being a 'Sahridaya', a certain



discipline to reach out to the heart of literary creations. It was also a critical audience, by which I mean a thinking and knowledgeable section of society which had its own share of responsibility in creating a critical climate, or what Arnold called the 'power of the moment', for the making of a 'great' work of art. In such a compact society, the pass word was criticism or appreciation and there was hardly any need for reviewing. There was a kind of sophistication in that decision-making strata of society, whose pronouncements would be, more or less, in the nature of pontifical statements. The more cultured a reading public and the greater its distinction in intellectual power, the less necessity would there be for forcing attention on them. The function of that literary aristocracy was to criticise, and in the words of Henry James 'to criticise is to appreciate, to appreciate is to take intellectual possession, to establish a fine relation with the criticised thing and make it one's own'. To be thus seriously interested in literary creations is to be stylised, for classification, as 'high-brow'.

Such was the rich heritage of the reading public in India which thinned down in course of time. How and why it has happened is not within the scope of this paper. Perhaps the intellectuals lost control of the reading public. Perhaps the rising intelligentsia tried to do something about it, but in course of its efforts, it found it had nothing to fall back upon as a sustaining force, except love for the land and the comforts of stagnation.

A new movement of education started in the last century with Macaulay's classical note on Western education. Into a fast disintegrating society, the English were successful in introducing their own language and literature. English studies, in and outside academic centres, phased their progress around certain recognisable historical determinants. In the years preceding Macaulay's minute, English studies had all the fascination of a zealous mistress, and, no wonder, quite a few talented individuals took to its cultivation. Out of sheer interest and necessity in maintaining friendship with foreigners, a section of the Indian reading public avidly studied English and, obviously, the novel was the easily negotiable vehicle for them. They were just that sort of people, who, in the words of Dr Johnson, 'would read at those hours when they would otherwise be unemployed, because it would be unreasonable'. They, perhaps, read in

snatches and they did not bother to become a Bentley or a Clarke. With the obvious disadvantages of such desultory reading, they however had a saving grace of reading the Western Fiction without stabilising certain attitudes or prejudices.

By 1850, conditions were propitious in the country for the introduction of English as a compulsory subject of study and as the medium of instruction in colleges. However, the educational system was designed to produce men who would assist in the colonial administration. Young Indians were trained in the limited knowledge needed by subordinates. Naturally the stress was on the development of an obedient rather than on a creative, inventive mind. The taste and selection of the reading matter was left to foreigners in most cases. It would now seem humiliating for the Indian to have his taste censored by Western mentors.

It was about this period that periodical literature began in our country and it facilitated literacy on a large scale. Schools and colleges turned out scores of boys and girls annually who were anxious to read something other than their text books. Whereas fifty years ago, not many were able to read in English, now a million could not only read and write, but were also possessed of miscellaneous knowledge. Besides, the conditions of modern life created a need to read something when not actively employed. The adopted tongue also had become so familiar that it slowly lost some of the hideous earmarks of adoption that it bore before. Journalism thus had its own share of shaping the reading public into a widely receptive audience.

There is a point of view in saying that the great expansion of periodical literature was the main source of fostering serial novels of perhaps, questionable artistic excellence. Reading was no longer a minority affair and there arose millions of readers of all sorts. They showed active interest in what had happened around them. The Indian's gift to tell a story, his instinct or weakness to listen to a story, fostered the rapid spread of popular magazines. The novelist who had to be content with few hundred readers at best, found thousands to read him. It is still true that the majority of readers are not especially choosy and they care little for style and subtleties. One would expect novels and magazines depend upon this unfastidious public. A writer has to write in order to live with the result, he can hardly



forego the quick returns of literary reviewing, or of a 5,000-word essay to a memorial volume. Even a serious novelist who would not be writing novels all his life would walk into the lure of little magazines.

Most of these magazines are cheap—cheap in more than one sense. Catering to the popular taste, the novelist blasts off piecemeal compositions, passable imitations of plot, and instalment construction of chapters for serial issue. While the aim of serial publication is to reach a new and wider public, some of our writers, instead of planning the whole novel before serialization, wrote in the manner of Thackeray or Scott whose novels are rather loose-knit and are indicative of drawbacks in serial publication. However, these things do not matter to an average reader. He is uncritical and he does not ask awkward questions. He is content if you tell him a story to the regulation of 500 pages, however thin and trivial. The onus of having to provide such entertainment was not burdensome to many a novelist. But to some, it is important to say, it became a problem and they were wanted rather less. All these developments have not had a healthy effect upon the novelist and his readers.

However with the increasing popularity of fiction, there came the necessity for modern Press, to serve as middleman between novelist and reader. While hardly one literary journal with distinction and authority is available, there is a mushroom of magazines which satisfy the demand about the readableness of books. Here, again, the characteristic uncriticalness of an average reader is reflected. For instance, a write-up on *This Time of The Morning* reads:

Mrs Sahaghal is the niece of Nehru and daughter of Mrs Pandit. She has had exceptional opportunities to observe closely ministers and secretaries, Governors and ambassadors. This novel is the fruit of her experiences. . .

No one who wishes to understand India before and after Independence can afford to ignore this novel. Its range is wide. Religion, politics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, sex, art and culture are to be found in it.

It is obvious that the above-mentioned ingredients alone could not make up a great novel. The reviewer proceeds to place the novelist in an 'enviable place among the best writers at work in

India today'. Such an unquestioning acceptance of what is given by literary luminaries is identified with the low-brow readers in respect of background of taste and intellectual environment. There is also a tendency among reviewers to be charitable (or uncritical) towards Indian novels in English. They prefer to make concessions against the peculiarly difficult circumstances of the novelist in English. They make no honest assessment of novels on their own merits. Then how could standards be national, if not international?

There is yet another danger to fiction in the academics' attitude towards reviewing. The learned audience prefer to substitute easier reading habit for minute analysis of a novel, which demands considerable effort on their part. In fact critiques of a single novel are quite uncommon in their critical quarterlies. They did not attempt beyond giving neat summaries and comments on the structure of a novel. One of the serious objections to academic criticism is its propensity to substitute assertion for argument or to the frequency of arbitrary and sometimes petulant verdicts, seldom supported even by a single quotation from the work condemned. However those journals will have certain claim upon the gratitude of the literary as well as reading public.

At this point the academic critic will point out that it is precisely the task of the novelist to educate the reader, to set the fashion in culture and taste, to lead the reading public from the vulgar to the real values in literature. It is a satisfying critical gossip which precludes values of criticism such as careful reading and thoughtful evaluation of a work of art. The essence of reading, as Katherine Leaver put it, is 'involvement', and the starting point of criticism is the experience of the reader. Unless this criterion of judging a novel is ruthlessly adopted by the academicians, by which I mean the scholarly and serious-minded public, the novelists would relapse into smugness or exaggeration in reflecting the spirit of the times in their novels. They are the interpreters and valuers whether acknowledged or not. They have to sift the grain from the chaff, make challenging discriminations in their criticism of fiction, evidence a high level of literary taste in reading and maintain a high standard of literary culture in the reading public. Otherwise they would be accused of indifference to any serious literary standards.



Of all the writers of English fiction Thomas Hardy was most popular among both the high-brow and the low-brow readers for different reasons. Hardy came to be known at a period of social and intellectual ferment in India. There was a kind of reawakening due to the impact of English education upon the literary reading public which soon discovered a new and fascinating world in the novels of Hardy.

Hardy's novels are primarily stories of passion which would readily move readers of untrained emotions. They treat in fierce details, elemental emotions like love and jealousy, characteristics which are sure to strike a sympathetic chord in the Indian audience. As seen in the characters from rural life, for instance, a character like the impulsive Eustacia with her burning love and extinction, the erratic Wildeve and the guileless Thomasin or the broken-hearted Mrs Yeobright, moving against the seemingly contrived and unfortunate circumstances in life, would powerfully excite the reader's interest. Of all the elements in Hardy's tragic portraits of human life, it is not the careful construction of plot or the mysterious magnitude of nature description (e.g., Egdon Heath), but the skilful use of chance element that emphasises the sense of fate, working blindly as well as frequently against man, that appeals to readers of different levels in India. While the British audience would have appreciated Hardy's dramatic descriptions of stormy scenes (Egdon Heath), convincing narration of improbable situations, characteristic humour and behaviour of rustic characters like Diggory Venn, Indian intellect appreciates that which closely resembled his own tradition of thinking in life. Hardy's view of life (viz., Man's unsuccessful attempt to meet the circumstances of life) comprising fatalism and the dignity of man even in dark moments of life, would reasonably impress the Indian high-brow. Melancholy sentiments like 'to be born is a palpable dilemma' or Eustacia's agonised utterance 'How I have tried to be a splendid woman and how destiny has been against me. I do not deserve my lot' would be read with unquestioning acceptance. To the thinking section of readers, the riddles in life such as the happenings in the 'closed door' scene provide scope for speculation or explication. To the uncultivated reader, the irony of situations conjures a feeling of identity or prevariation of his own life. To the academic group, the architectonic structure of the plot, the employment of three unities, the grouping of

characters into major and minor—are ‘askable’ ‘important’ in the examinations.

The second in popularity among the Indian readers is Dickens and the focus of interest on Dickens can be attributed to a newly awakened social consciousness among the British reading public itself. It was the period of industrial revolution which brought out certain gross characteristics of the English society. The zeal and energy with which Dickens diagnosed the ills of society, such as the heartlessness of aristocracy, the divorce of mind and heart in personal relationships, the evil consequences of an unimaginative educational system, was only disarmed by corrective humour and sincerity of purpose. Dickens was never uninteresting to the Indians, because some of the blemishes that he criticised in novel after novel, existed in the Indian society also especially characters of eccentricity and grotesque demeanour, the pathos coming upon hardship and woe of child labour, were read with delight and hence remembered.

Dickens would not appeal strongly to women readers in general. A writer who dealt so largely with the coarser aspect of life, could never be women’s choice. It is true that Dickens drew several pictures of more or less detestable widows of the lower middle class. While they lived comfortably, the real business of their life was to make all about them as uncomfortable as they could. Though there is a grain of exaggeration in such satiric portraiture, one would marvel at his tireless observation in the interest of social welfare.

The public today reads a great deal but in so confused and unmethodical a manner that it hardly encourages hard thinking on problems of life. The readers would be satisfied if their casual perusal of fiction could yield them a warm, vicarious excitement; for instance a cursory glance at *Robinson Crusoe* or *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* will readily yield what the majority of readers would want to kill time by way of entertainment and illusion. But the conflicting religious beliefs and practices in the varying human worlds of English and Indian in the town of Chandrapore and the treatment of East-West relations on the personal level are impossible for people to read satisfactorily without developing a high degree of literary taste and critical sensibility for fiction. Similarly the first reading of *The Portrait of a Lady* could yield only a small portion of its meaning. The significance of Madam Merle’s



reference to the cup, the implication of Mr Touchett's bequest to Isabel or James's idea of 'seeing' Europe 'to live' are such overtones that could make meaning to readers only on repeated readings. One of the disciplines of a maturing society should be to cause or condition in its own way, an intellectual climate, the power of which will give birth to power for creating great works of fiction. In this context, it should be noted, that literary reviewers would be doing a great service to fiction if they did not descend, in their reviews, from critics to apologists, then to be champions of popular taste.

The arrival of Gandhi which let loose an important force in the national life of the country has a marked impress of his views and personality upon writers and artists alike. Partly due to their failure to understand Gandhi's views on English education in proper perspective, the powers that be checkmated the popularity of English studies with patriotic sentiments. As long as the Indian intellectuals, armed with English pioneered the struggle for rights and liberties, the countrymen held them together, although rivalries existed. But, regional interests cropped up later which attempted to dislodge, at their own peril, the importance of English studies. What were the motivations of the majority party in the parliament apart from the obvious one of patriotism which made them dispute the continuance of English? It is intriguing. It intrigues us more when viewed against the historical setting.

The magnificent polemical essays of Raja Ram Mohan Roy reveals the ease and suppleness with which he handled the English language. Vivekananda's collected works are largely read in English. Tagore pioneered the translation of some of his own works in Bengali into English. Most of Gandhiji's remarks are quoted from English contributions to *Young India*. Sri Aurobindo wrote not only prose but composed his epic poem *Savitri* in English. Nehru thought and wrote mainly in English. The philosophical writings of Dr Radhakrishnan and Ananda Coomaraswamy are all in English. And as we see amidst us, two at least of the Indian novelists write in English, not to please an outlandish audience, not even because they made a studied choice of medium, but, as their works reveal, their inner compulsions found a natural outlet in that medium of expression, the quality of which is not strained in any way. So, it seems to me,

the difficulties of an alien language are not an inhibiting factor in forming extensive readership for Indian novelists in English.

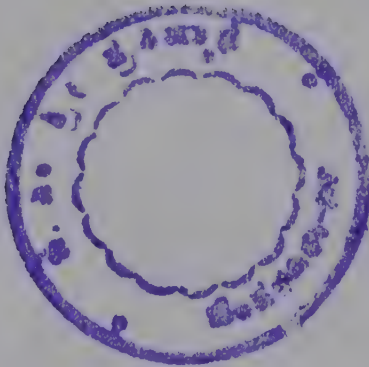
The Indian novelist in English is only as old as English Studies in India. The novelist makes his start like anyone of the thousands of young men who begin their study of English language from scratch. His early progress, though hampered by the limited practice he gets in its use in the class room, is assisted by more opportunities for practice in writing. He might find occasions to write or debate on Kipling the novelist, Noel Coward as a popular playwright, or James Joyce's latest experiments in form and style. In this way, the whole storehouse of English Fiction is open to him and there is equal access as well as opportunity for both the Western and the Indian novelists in English. Conceding broad problems of language and inherent inanities in the intellectual climate of the country, the Indian novelist has perhaps no excuse for lagging behind his counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The novelist in English must be wary of forming a gap between himself and the readers. What does it matter to the cultured or to the less cultured readers if a novelist experiments with concepts of his own coinage? Why should a novelist spend his efforts at homespun satire or humour on an audience whose idea of subtle fun is the obscene joke? There are novelists who turn out highly polished stories for the delectation of a select twenty. There are writers who first publish their books abroad to secure condescending praise from Western practitioners. Some of them attained a certain degree of technical competence and facility in using the English language. And yet (let me be forgiven for my impudence) which Indian novelist can say that he has more than a few hundred constant readers? Which novelist can honestly maintain that his next work is eagerly awaited by thousands? Why is it, that the presence or absence of a novelist's name from a magazine is unlikely to affect the (fortunes or) circulations of that magazine? Am I wrong to surmise that the colourful personalities of these novelists fail to take advantage of a splendid opportunity to build up a great reading public?

Here is a group of writers who use English effectively and who remain unread. Here is a vast reading public which would like to read them but can't because of its limited training in that language. Is no solution possible? What kind of novels will flourish in this country if we encourage our people, directly or



indirectly, to read merely the trash? What kind of reading public is going to develop if our novelists continue to feed, exclusively the appetite of the high-brow or the low-brow? These are my genuine doubts and I could only conclude, from what I have attempted before, that, as taste develops, there arises a body of cultivated readers upon whom the future of Indian novel depends. Novelists need discriminating readers and you will agree that the praise of professional reviewers or large sales of fiction could hardly substitute its thousands of appreciative readers.



## EAST-WEST ENCOUNTER: INDIAN WOMEN WRITERS OF FICTION IN ENGLISH

N. MEENA BELLIAPPA

EAST-WEST encounter forms an important area of concern in the works of Kamala Markandaya, Santha Rama Rau and Ruth Pravar Jhabvala. There is an attempt to exploit the possibilities of the theme to portray the human situation. A major pre-occupation seems to be the exploration of factors that hamper harmonious relations between diverse races and cultures. Kamala Markandaya in *Some Inner Fury* comes nearest the depiction of a happy inter-racial relationship in her portrayal of the love between Richard and Mira. Personal attraction coupled with genuine open-mindedness to each other's people and culture seems to have brought them close to each other. Yet they succumb to forces that divide them into clear-cut categories of 'your people' and 'my people'. Kamala Markandaya sees the forces of separation as operating in the hostile political circumstances of the forties. Though the pathos of the human situation thus depicted has its appeal, the problem of East-West relations gets limited to the consideration of an unusual situation.

Santha Rama Rau treats the problem in its more fundamental aspect in *Remember the House*. Something that goes beyond political differences seems to stand for ever between East and West. There is a disparity between the two patterns of life, modes of thinking and feeling and in the objectives that each society sets before it. These differences are reflected in the breaking up of the friendship between Alix and Baba, products of different cultures. Even at their closest, Baba is conscious of how different Alix's intonation is from hers when she talks of ambition, success, love and happiness—all interconnected in a restless pursuit. There is a breakdown of communication when Baba attempts to explain to Alix brought up in the Western scientific tradition, happenings like the yogi being buried alive. Nor can Alix, with her western notions of divorce, understand the spiritual compulsions that make Baba's mother live apart from her husband. These barriers created by differences in



cultural background are magnified by individual inadequacies. Alix's determination to love India is as superficial as Adela Quested's desire to see the 'real India'. Her interest in India and Baba is just the love of a new sensation. It is not genuine, for it is not directed towards understanding the country and its people.

The breakdown of communication in human relations suggested in *Remember the House* is developed remarkably well in Miss Rau's dramatisation of Forster's novel *A Passage to India*. Though it doesn't strictly fall within the scope of a study of fiction it might not be out of place to consider the handling of the dialogue, especially since it stresses an awareness of the basic factors underlying East-West encounter. It is the inadequacy of the means of communication which results in queer entanglements. The Indians and the English speak different languages so to say, and it is rarely they meet across the barrier of language. Underlying their different usages is the incompatibility of racial traits and social ethos. Aziz takes offence easily because he cannot comprehend the subtleties of the English idiom and his touchiness as a member of the subject race does the rest. Listen to this piece of dialogue introduced into the play by Miss Rau :

Fielding: But nobody carries a spare collar stud in his pocket.

Aziz: I, always! In case of emergency.

Fielding: Nonsense.

*(Aziz stares at the stud in his hand, dismayed. He puts it in his pocket, touchily.)*

Aziz: Indians are famous for talking nonsense, doubtless you know that.

It is obvious the word 'nonsense' has misfired. In the syntactical structure of Aziz's sentences and his overstatements, Miss Rau tries to suggest the lack of sustained thought and tonal unity resulting from an emotional extravagance wherein is caricatured a characteristic trait of the race. His uncertain hold on the language comes to light again when Miss Quested announces her engagement to Heaslop :

Aziz: *(first taken aback)* To Mr Heaslop? Oh! This is a surprise! Well, never mind, never mind! *(bouncing about)* What excellent news! Many, many heartiest congratulations.

His initial surprise is understandable. But why the 'never mind's, so discordant in tone with the immediately following 'What excellent news!' And note the extravagance of 'many, many heartiest congratulations'. It is characteristic of Aziz that he should affect a closeness unwarranted by any actual understanding, with his breezy generalisations drawn from insufficient data. For instance, Aziz is comparing Hinduism and Islam and says,

We poor Muslims, we rely on our heart, not so much in our intellect. The feelings of our heart will lead us to God, do you not agree?

Fielding: Well, we are taught that God is love, but I have never—

Aziz: You see? You see? We are brothers after all, Mr Fielding.

No wonder he makes Fielding's head swim. He can hardly wait till the sentence is completed to understand the context or the trend of Fielding's thoughts. His preoccupation in the use of language is with creating a striking attitude and effect, not with precise expression of well-formed thought or feeling.

It is interesting to note the tangles resulting from different connotations of the same words in the minds of the speakers. Consider this. Mrs Moore is ruminating on the scenery spread below—

Moore: And you and I, Adela, are used to something more orderly. Something romantic yet manageable . . . there is no comfort here. . . .

Aziz: (*who has not quite followed all this*) Comfort! Mrs Moore you will be comfortable here, I promise you. Come and sit down in the shade and rest yourself. . . .

The speakers dwell in different worlds which merely jostle against each other. Watch Miss Quested and Godbole pitching against each other their characteristic abstractions. Miss Quested, dwelling in a bookish world of humanitarian ideals, says: 'I feel that any modern, educated person has a duty to the community in which he lives, India that is. So you see, enjoyment



just isn't enough'. Oblivious of what she means, Godbole comes out with his ready-made concepts of Hinduism addressed to the uncomprehending ladies: 'Use and abuse are same in the end' etc. Neither Mrs Moore nor Adela can grasp the significance of the philosophic concepts, understanding, as they do, his English as English and not as 'Indian'. Godbole's tendency to formalise in abstractions even small-talk reflects a racial weakness.

We have something very much like it in the comical principal of *Remember the House* talking in mixed up idioms and mis-applied quotations. Here is what he says to Baba, being shown round the school by Krishnan: 'How you like our eschool? . . . . In this quiet backwater, I fear, we will not make educational history but must be content with our modest lot. As the poet says, 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave,' isn't it? Ah, perhaps I am mistaken! No doubt the great talent of Mr Krishnan as guide, philosopher and friend has blinded you to our faults, isn't it?' One feels that these specimens of Indian English are there not only to mark off character, but, considering the general context, to reveal an imperfect understanding of a foreign language that goes deeper than an ignorance of grammar and syntax. An uncertain grasp of the situation is revealed in the principal continuing his laboured sallies and quotations in the midst of the general commotion under a falling pendal. The verbal lapses signify in the case of Aziz and Godbole, an inability to establish a point of contact with the members of an alien race and in the case of the schoolmaster, with one of the westernised members of his own country. For the East-West encounter might be introverted within a community, by the incorporation of elements of a different culture within its sensibility and way of living. In such a context breakdown of communication might occur between members of the same community as happens between Baba and Krishnan, the schoolmaster. In spite of being far more sensible than his principal and wielding a better command over the medium of communication, he cannot quite catch the bantering tone that Baba has imbibed from her more sophisticated upbringing. Whether it is a playful remark on *Julius Caesar* or algebra he takes it literally. And when she comments in a lighter vein 'Isn't the principal marvellous?' (meaning of course, 'Isn't he absurd?') Krishnan replies, 'Yes, he is. A very competent administrator' and goes on to elaborate his statement.

The irony ensuing from the breakdown of communication is exploited best in the ambiguous conversations of Krishnan and Baba—in that scene, particularly, where the romance crazy Baba thinks that Krishnan is manoeuvring a private proposal in public, while all that he is trying to tell her is his difficulties as schoolmaster. Thinking that he is seeking reassurance from her, she says,

‘I can understand that. It might even be fun Trying to Make Ends Meet, as it’s usually described.’

‘Fun?’ Krishnan said, shocked at this flippancy.

‘Well, not exactly *fun*, but you know, a challenge, like working out a problem in algebra—not of course, that I understand algebra, having been to an English school.’

‘Didn’t they teach you algebra in England?’ Krishnan asked, monetarily distracted.

‘Well, yes, they did, but it’s conventional not to understand it. Like getting history mixed up and wondering what a surfeit of lampreys are—or is.’

Krishnan looked very puzzled and said, ‘I see,’ he added severely, ‘Poverty isn’t *fun*, you know.’

The word ‘fun’ used in the context of the Americans has obvious tonal echoes. Baba is thinking of ‘love’ and ‘fun’ in terms of the sense of excitement that Alix and Nicky as lovers communicated. Lost in the romantic vision of two young lovers fighting against odds, Baba hasn’t the slightest notion what poverty is nor what Krishnan is trying to say. And Krishnan, whose thoughts are remote from ‘love’ and who has felt the pinch of a hard life, is bewildered that anybody could think of fun in connection with poverty.

The incongruities of character and situation resulting from an intermixing of East and West are treated with ironical amusement by Ruth Prawar Jhabvala. Her handling of the theme is essentially that of a writer of social comedy. Her method is to present certain situations and follow faithfully the train of thought and feeling of each character, creating for the time being an illusion of complete sympathy and endorsement. But the juxtaposition of contrasting characters and the incongruity of a particular mode of thinking pitched against a specific situation, makes the reader



perceive ironic undertones. The representation of the married life of Esmond and Gulab is an excellent illustration of Jhabvala's art. You see things from Gulab's point of view, participate in her languor; share her relish for hot, spicy, curries smuggled in from her mother's house and eaten with her fingers, sitting on the floor; sympathise with her dislike of furniture which seems to her to restrict freedom of movement; understand her reluctance to go into smart society . . . and then, you see it all as Esmond does, a smartly furnished, modern flat superimposed with the animal presence of stupid, slovenly Gulab, whose interests in life do not go beyond sleep and food. It is then that you sense the tonal layers operating in the seemingly matter-of-fact, non-partisan narration and see the contrast, the incompatibility of two individuals who are as unlike each other as the ways of living they represent. There is hardly a meeting point between the two as we see in that scene where Esmond is chastising Gulab for her squalorly room, while she, immune to his sharp words, dreams with anticipated pleasure of the horseradish pancake with pickle that she and little Ravi would eat and of the lovely stolen hours in bed during Esmond's absence that evening. How impossible the whole situation is, is brought out when the mother-in-law confronts Esmond while Gulab desperately tries to silence her mother and placate her husband of whom she is mortally scared. Uma ignoring her daughter's pleading eyes bursts out angrily on how Ravi should be brought up:

'Such food he needs, and also he needs to have his legs rubbed with oil to make them strong and his hair must be shaved so that it may grow luxuriant, and black shadows must be applied under the eyes to shield them from the strong sun, and in the night he must sleep with his mother so that she may comfort him if he wakes with bad dreams'.

Esmond crossed his legs the other way and smiled tolerantly. But Gulab said, staring straight ahead: 'Mama, your ideas are so old-fashioned; we are educating Ravi according to modern theory'.

Esmond smiled brilliantly at his mother-in-law: 'Doesn't it sound silly, coming from her?'

'What do you mean? What are you saying against my daughter?'

'He is making joke!' Gulab cried.

Gulab's implicit acceptance of her husband's opinion of her is at once amusing and pathetic. The distorted idiom of her speech suggests the violation inherent in adapting one's thought processes and speech modes to the genius of another language and culture.

It is dramatically apt that at such moments, Esmond, longing for a wife who's his 'friend and companion' and not his 'slave', should shift his thoughts to Betty's pert little face and wish 'to be near her quick lively mind and her quick lively body, which was spare and cool and dry and smelt of hay like an English field in summer'. Betty affords her Englishness, in sharp contrast to the heavy, oriental Gulab, is the one emotional reality which he clutches in desperation. Jhabvala shows an understanding of Esmond's predicament. All the same, the satire directed against him has a sharp edge. If his hopeless situation evokes sympathy, it is neutralised by the fact that his self-seeking has trapped him in it. Stupid and sluggish though Gulab is there is a genuineness about her animal nature, while Esmond's cultural preoccupations ring so false—especially when we consider how out of sympathy he is with the climate, the landscape, the people and their way of living. We feel the sarcasm of the Englishman's comment to Shakuntala: 'Didn't you know, he's come specially to India to teach you people all about your own country'. He is the end-product of the perfunctory western interest in Indian culture as evinced in the eagerness of the new diplomatic community in post-Independence India. The superficiality of the whole thing is suggested by the incongruity of culture talk in a cocktail party and of dilettantes like Har Dayal and his daughter Shakuntala passing off for authorities on Indian culture. And what could match the absurdity of Har Dayal engaging Esmond Stillwood to instruct his daughter on culture, especially Indian. The comedy of the human situation is well exploited in the odd assortment of Esmond, Indra and Shakuntala in that farce called private tuition in which none of the three is interested. Jhabvala's criticism is implicit in her satiric portrayal. A serious treatment of deeper issues does not fall within her scope. She comes very near it in the depiction of Esmond though she takes care not to produce a discrepancy of tone in her handling of the subject.



The impact of the West on Indian society is an interesting feature of the East-West encounter. It is the absurdities resulting from a senseless aping of Western manners that catch the eye of a social satirist like Jhabvala. The inferiority complex of an erstwhile subject race that tries to out-West the West, is caricatured in the brazen, unattractive Billimoria sisters loudly decrying Indian music, while the English ladies express a desire to understand it—‘Oh please, you need not think that we enjoy that cat-wailing any more than you do’. Ridiculous too are the affectations of the Har Dayal family—as in Amrit excusing himself for using his fingers at lunch. The intoxicating effect that the first taste of the free ways of Western men and women has on an adolescent like Shakuntala is seen in her attempts to draw out Esmond. Her desperate efforts to show off her emancipation have quite a comical conclusion in the oriental touch she gives to her offering herself to her reluctant hero: ‘Let me be your slave, please allow me. I want to humble myself before you’.

• Kamala Markandaya, in *Some Inner Fury*, portrays, incidentally, Western influence on Indians and the consequent problem of adjustment as in Kit’s impatience of Indian customs and conditions (in contrast to Richard’s tolerance and willingness to adapt himself). The conflict between Eastern and Western patterns of living is reflected in the failure of marriage between the westernised Kit and the homespun Premala. We see the Western influence operating in the transformation of shy little Mira, used to a sheltered life, into an independent working woman shaping her life on untraditional lines. However, these changes and conflicts are touched upon perfunctorily. Kamala Markandaya’s concern seems to be with telling a ‘story’ of human interest. Her style of narration and treatment of the subject do not contain evidence of her having wrestled with the deeper implications of the social situation created by the Western impact.

In *Possession*, she tries to concretise the invincibility of the spiritual power of the East confronted with the glamour of the materialistic society of the West. But Valmiki who forms the focal point of the conflict is a mere puppet without the freedom to choose for himself. Moreover, the exoticism inherent in the story of an Indian goatherd who is a genius and a western Jezebel who discovers his talent and transplants him into another soil,

comes in the way of any significant exploration of either East-West relations or the impact of an alien culture on the life of an individual. And the attempted dramatic encounter between the products of two different kinds of discipline, the spiritual Swamy and the sophisticated Lady Caroline, fails due to her inability to reconcile the figure of a Swamy who has renounced all attachments with the fact of his interest in his protegee. He is now the ancient sage wielding spiritual power in solitude, now the modern Swamiji undertaking lecture tours. He comes and goes to suit the exigencies of the plot while the bizarre Caroline dominates the scene. The structure is far too jejune to sustain the pattern of experience sought to be embodied.

Perhaps it is Santia Rama Rau who fares best in bringing a depth of interest to her treatment of East-West encounter, by depicting the clash of cultures in the individual's search for a pattern of living. In Baba's fascination for the Americans and her addiction to foreign novels we have a good instance of the confusion resulting from exposure to a foreign culture, not necessarily at its best. She mistakes Alix's relish for fun for a deeper vitality. Deluded by the excitement of Alix's love-talk, she feels she can't marry Hari since they are not in love in the manner of Alix and Nicky. It further leads her to the foolishness of the Krishnan episode. In weaving into personal issues in Baba's life the implications of her friendship with the Americans, Santha Rama Rau reveals the carefully worked out design of her novel. Building up the plot for her is an art of preparing the reader for the final moment of recognition in the light of which Baba chooses Hari. This is done mainly by the creation of an emotional symbol with reference to which all important discriminations are made. Her life in Jalnabad House is the operating emotional factor. Neither her English education nor her hectic life in the westernised society of Bombay can destroy the significance of a way of life embodied in her grandmother. The disparity in attitudes and approaches between the eastern and the western, the traditional and the modern ways is brought to focus in the situation created by the interest that both grandmother and granddaughter develop in Krishnan as an eligible bridegroom. To the romance-crazy Baba babbling of being in love with Krishnan, the old lady says: "Just think what is it, this 'love' of yours? A little excitement, a little impatience, much imagination—is



that enough to found your life on?" Her words become vividly real in that excruciating moment of disillusionment which shatters Baba's romantic dreams. Baba's recognition of the terms in which she must live her life comes with a compelling force not because it is presented as the absolute truth, but one that has validity in the context of Baba's life.

The search for an optimum point of contact between diverse cultures and races seems to have yielded only negative results. A fruitful union at a significant depth is not treated by any of the three writers. It is the point of separation that stands underlined in their works.

# EAST-WEST ENCOUNTER: KIPLING

M. TARINAYYA

## I

‘Oh, East is East, and West is West and never the twain  
shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great judgment  
seat;’

THIS IS an interesting instance of the way quotations are parroted for and against without any attempt to look up their context or discover their meaning. Nothing in fact could be more misleading than this half-truth, for Kipling himself has said:

But there is neither East nor West, Border nor Breed nor  
Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face though they come  
from the ends of the earth!<sup>1</sup>

In spite of geographical, linguistic and racial obstacles, intercourse between India and the West throughout the ages<sup>2</sup> has gone on almost uninterrupted. Even before the dawn of history, India was closely connected with contemporary cultures in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. There were political as well as intellectual contacts between Greece and India, Persia forming the link between the two; there are striking and unmistakable resemblances between ancient Indian thought and writing and Greek philosophy. The noble prayer of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad<sup>3</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> Compare, however, Macaulay’s words: The East bowed before the West. In patient, deep disdain.

See Coomaraswamy: *Hinduism and Buddhism*, p. 28; *The Dance of Shiva*, p. 19: To say that East is East and West is West is simply to hide one’s head in the sand.

<sup>2</sup> See R. A. Jairajbhoy: *Foreign Influence in Ancient India*. The author traces step by step the political, cultural and commercial contacts India has had with the outside world over the course of 3,500 years and shows how these contacts have contributed to the richness and diversity of Indian culture and civilization.

<sup>3</sup> Swami Prabhavananda and F. Manchester: *The Upanishads*, p. 80.



Lead me from the unreal to the real.  
 Lead me from darkness to light  
 Lead me from death to immortality.

finds many an echo in Plato's Dialogues<sup>1</sup>. The Buddhist *Jatakas*, *The Panchatantra* and *The Hitopadesa* found their way to the West.

During the Middle Ages, however, there was little or no direct contact between India and the West. It was established once again when a chance wind brought Vasco da Gama to the harbour of Calicut. Then came the British. Shakespeare, Milton, Southey, Campbell, Moore, Dryden, Shelley, Wordsworth were all attracted by the glamour of an unknown India. To them India was a land of romantic dynasties, luxury, exotic beauty and mystic religions. To their literary descendents however 'India became a dull and arid land in which some dull and arid compatriots spend their working life',<sup>2</sup> and the Western world did not take kindly to Indian thought and religion. Historically this synchronized with the period when the entire Indian sub-continent came under the political supremacy of Britain, the struggle for existence left no time for reflection and the Western Man confined his thoughts 'to the subject of tomorrow's food for himself and his family; the mere Will to life took precedence of the Will to Power'.<sup>3</sup>

It must be said that the works of Western scholars, notably Max Muller and Sir William Jones did create interest in Indian thought and literature. To them, once again, India was a land of beauty, of wisdom, and of mystic religions. Max Muller edited the 'Sacred Books of the East'—a series of English translations of the Oriental religious classics. To him India was a veritable paradise on earth and a country 'most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty', 'where the human mind had most fully developed some of the choicest gifts, has most

<sup>1</sup> B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*; also see A. P. Roy: *The Quest of the Infinite*, pp. 342-343. One is reminded of Sir William Jones who said: "It is impossible to read the Vedanta or the many fine compositions of it, without believing that Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India."

<sup>2</sup> G. T. Garratt, *The Legacy of India*, pp. 319-422.

<sup>3</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, p. 24; also see Sir John Woodroffe, *Is India Civilized?* pp. 105, 117.

deeply pondered over the problems of life and has found the solutions of some of them, which well deserve the attention of those who have studied Plato and Kant'.<sup>1</sup> Sir William Jones left his native England for India and never returned to it. His attempt to understand India was real and to his observation the Hindus presented a living picture of antiquity; conquerors had established themselves at different times and in different parts of the country, but the inhabitants had lost little of their original character. He was convinced that all attempts to explore the religion and literature of India through any other medium than a knowledge of Sanskrit must be imperfect and unsatisfactory, and he devoted his life to an understanding of the 'Hindu Mind', dispelling some of the erroneous and distorted opinions circulated by ignorant tourists, travellers, and writers of popular and semi-popular books<sup>2</sup>. India was entirely a new world and a new experience to him: 'I was never unhappy in England; it was not in my nature to be so; but I never was happy till I settled in India'.<sup>3</sup> Sir William Jones was a martyr to the cause of proper humanistic relations between India and the West. He was as one writer has put it, 'the West's greatest contribution to the East'.<sup>4</sup>

This phase unfortunately did not last long. Caught in the struggle for existence and the exploitation of the material wealth of the East in the name of civilization, Western writers began to adopt a rather supercilious attitude. Despite the 'momentous consequences of the impact of Britain upon India', and the close contact over a considerable period of time of two civilizations such as those of the British and the Hindus, the cultural synthesis which one would have expected, did not take place. The spiritual wealth and cultural heritage of India lay buried. This does not, however, mean that writers like Edwin Arnold, Huxley, 'A.E.' Yeats and Eliot were unread in Indian thought and religion. A few writers have tackled the theme of East-West encounter in

<sup>1</sup> *Indo-Asian Culture*, p. 234, No. 3, Vol. 14, July, 1965.

See also Wilfred Nolle, *Germany, Veda's Second Home*, pp. 7, 18.

<sup>2</sup> See the writings of Sir Henry Norman, William Archer, Lord Macaulay, Robert Nicholls and Catherine Mayo, on India.

Also see 'Misconceptions About Indian Culture', pp. 23-24 in *Essential Features of Indian Culture* by K. M. Panikkar.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Teignmouth, *The Works of Sir William Jones*, Vol. II, p. 130.

See Tagore: *Nationalism*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Garland Cannon, *Oriental Jones*, p. 179.



their fictional writing and fiction with Indian local colour dealing with Anglo-Indian life is over 150 years old. It is with Rudyard Kipling, however, that we come to the first great writer of Anglo-Indian fiction. Then came E. M. Forster; Forster's achievement was followed by Edward Thompson's. These were followed by L. H. Myres (*The Near and the Far*), Max Wylie (*Hindu Heaven*), Dennis Gray Stoll (*The Dove Found No Rest*), Charles Fabri (*Indian Flemingo*), H. E. Bates (*The Scarlet Sword*), and John Masters (*Bhowani Junction*). This paper is an attempt to explore how Kipling in *Kim*, (1901), has imaginatively tried to understand India, how far he has succeeded in facing the challenge of the East, and leaping over the barriers which divide East and West.

## II

'I urged him to . . . find a life that had never been expressed in literature, instead of a life where all had been expressed'.<sup>1</sup>

• The ancient civilizations of the West—Greece, Rome, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon have disappeared. Dead is Greece and dead are her gods; the power of Rome is just a chapter in history; Egypt lives in her mummies and the pyramids. But India lives and there is a wonderful unity and continuity in her movement throughout the centuries of glory and sorrow. Despite the invasions and destructions age after age, India has not lost her spiritual heritage, while a fraction of such calamities has destroyed many a nation and culture in world history. This aspect of India, the panorama of the Indian world, the procession of different aspects of the multitudinous life, must have fascinated Kipling, and he has indeed, for his *Kim*, chosen a life 'that had never been expressed' in English fiction. Kipling's biographer tells us that 'he (Kipling) turned to his oft-considered plan for a picaresque novel of the Indian underworld. . . . Three times at 'Naulakha' he put his hand to the old notes which he thought of using as the raw-material of a quite new book. The notion of *Kim* was stirring in his mind but would not take shape. . . . The Summer of 1900 saw the completion of his last word on India, the story called *Kim*, and at which he had been working intermittently for more than seven years. . . . India remained in his eyes the

<sup>1</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 343.

unchanging East, as he remembered it from childhood, and so described it, lovingly in *Kim*.<sup>1</sup>

Kipling had no pretensions whatever to a complete understanding of the mystery that India has always been even to some of the most discerning minds of the West. He was aware of his limitations and he knew that there were aspects of India he could not hope to penetrate:

A stone's throw out on either hand  
From that well-ordered road we tread,  
And all the world is wild and strange;  
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For we have reached the Oldest Land  
Where the Powers of Darkness range.<sup>2</sup>

The variety, complexity and the shifting splendour of Indian life must have dazzled and daunted Kipling.

If we were to ask the reader of fiction in English to choose the finest novel about India written by a native speaker of English, the choice would certainly be *Kim*. Even Nirad Chaudhury who is extremely critical of Kipling and Forster and their understanding of India, in an article contributed to the *Encounter*<sup>3</sup> says that '*Kim* is not only the finest novel in the English language with an Indian theme, but also one of the greatest of English novels. . . . *Kim* is great by any standards that ever obtained in any age of English literature'.

*Kim* is neither a political romance (though this part of the story too is exciting and admirably told) nor an exposition in fiction of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in India. Superficially, it might appear that the theme of *Kim* is the education of a police spy. But the real theme is the eternal drama of quest and discovery, aspiration and fulfilment, which the Buddhist Lama and his *Chela*, Kim enact before us. Though Kim says he was going 'to look for—for a bull—a Red Bull on a green field',<sup>4</sup> who shall help him later, and readily joins the 'Great Game' which whetted his curiosity and became a multiple test of his intelligence and

<sup>1</sup> Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work*, pp. 230-358.

<sup>2</sup> *The Definitive Edition of Rudyard Kipling's Verse*, p. 506.

<sup>3</sup> P. 47, Vol. VIII, No. 4, April, 1967.

Also see G. S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and His World*, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> *Kim*, p. 23.



endurance, it was the Lama's gentle, selfless wisdom, 'innocent of all evil', and 'the greatness of his heart' which magnetized him.

In *Kim*, Kipling never for a moment loses contact, with the Indian soil; he never loses contact with the common people, who have through the ages become so adapted to the soil that they have been as it were 'absorbed' by it. Early on in the novel, we are told that Kim, even as a boy had a defiant spirit and that he held views of his own'. He 'learned to avoid missionaries and white men of serious aspect who asked who he was, and what he did.... He consorted on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazaar (and that) he spoke the vernacular by preference and his mothertongue (i.e. English) in a clipped uncertain voice'.<sup>1</sup> Kim, though 'English and white' steeped himself in the life and atmosphere of the people, and Kipling gives us the impression that there was something strange and inexplicable about Kim and that he did not belong to the same creation as the rest of the white men in India. Talking about Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Dryden had remarked: 'There is such a variety of game springing before me that I am distracted in my choice, and I know not which to follow. 'Tis sufficient to say . . . here's God's plenty'.<sup>2</sup> One might say the same thing about Kipling's world. In the first few pages of the novel, we meet the low-caste vegetable seller and her husband, bhisti the water carrier sluicing crotons by the Lahore Museum, Mahbub Ali 'who had no particular desire to die by violence because two or three family blood-feuds across the border hung unfinished on his hands', and when these scores were cleared, intended to settle down more or less as a virtuous citizen, the 'Flower of Delight' whom Mahbub Ali followed with feet of intoxication, and a little later, the sleepy clerk at Lahore Railway Station, a burly Sikh artisan, a Hindu Jat<sup>3</sup> and his wife, the Amritsar Courtesan who, 'sniffing behind her drapery made eyes at a young sepoy', a fat Hindu money lender (his folded account book in a cloth under his arm) who lent money at 7 per cent a month with a mortgage on the unborn calf, a dogra soldier going south on leave, and the half caste guard who came round ticket collecting.

Whether it is the tempo of life at a crowded railway station or

<sup>1</sup> *Kim*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Grant, *Dryden* (ed.), pp. 484-485.

<sup>3</sup> See Harbans Singh, *Aspects of Punjabi Literature*, p. 67.

Kipling's description reminds us what the author says here.

the journey in an Indian railway train, the river of life on the Grand Trunk Road, where one meets 'new people' and sees 'new sights at every stride', life in the cramped and crowded Lahore streets or life in an Indian village, Kipling is masterly in his appeal: *Kim* is unrivalled for the sheer range and richness of detail and the delicacy and vividness of Kipling's observation is always obvious. These scenes evoke different kinds of smile and laughter, always sympathetic and hardly ever sarcastic or cruel. Throughout the book, there is a subtle play of humour almost like sunlight sifted through the branches of a tree. Kipling has appropriated the idiom of the people he had observed and put living speech into the mouth of the people his imagination has created: the greetings and exclamations of the people: 'Ohi, hai mai!'; their terms of abuse and their proverbs: 'thy mother was married under a basket', 'those who beg in silence starve in silence'; their idiom for expressing family relations: 'mother of my son, father of my daughter's son'; and their expressions for approval and disapproval: 'Arre, Ai'. No reader of *Kim* can fail to notice the way Kipling's English-educated Bengalee distorts the English idiom, makes phonemic 'transformations' but never fails to convey his message:

You see, I am verree small person here nowadays, in comparison with all his charms. By Jove, O'Hara, do you know he is afflicted with infirmity of fits.<sup>1</sup>

Well, you see, I am a fearful person and I do not like responsibility. You were sick, you see, and I did not know where deuce-an'-all the papers were, and if so, how many. So when I had come down here, I slipped in private wire to Mahbub—he was at Meerut for races—and I tell him how case stands. . . .<sup>2</sup>

The Indian peasant's Ganga remains Ganga and evokes all the associations it has for Indians; it hasn't become the Englishman's 'Ganges.' Consider how Kipling's pen transmits the sensation of the colossal depths and heights of the mountains on the edge of Tibet:

He (the Ao-Chung man) pointed through the window—opening into space that was filled with moonlight reflected from the snow—and threw out an empty whisky-bottle.

<sup>1</sup> *Kim*, p. 399.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 400.



No need to listen to the fall: 'This is the world's end', he said and went out. The Lama looked forth, a hand on either sill, with eyes that shone like yellow opals. From the enormous pit before him white peaks lifted themselves yearning to the moonlight. The rest was the darkness of interstellar space<sup>1</sup>.

Listen now to Kim going to beg food for the Lama:<sup>2</sup>

He trotted off to the open shop of Kunjri, a low-caste vegetable seller, which lay opposite the belt-tram-way line down the Motee Bazar. She knew Kim of old.

'Oho, hast thou turned yogi with thy begging bowl?' she cried. 'Nay', said Kim proudly. 'There is a new priest in the city a man such as I have never seen'.

'Old priest—young tiger', said the woman angrily. 'I am tired of new priests! They settle on our wares like flies. Is the father of my son a well of charity to give to all who ask'?

'Now' said Kim. 'Thy man is rather yagi (bad-tempered) than yogi (a holy man). But this priest is new. The sahib in the Wonder House has talked to him like a brother. O my mother, fill me this bowl. He waits'.

'That bowl indeed! That cow-bellied basket! Thou hast as much grace as the holy bull of Shiv. He has taken the best of a basket of onions already, this morn, and forsooth I must fill thy bowl. He comes again!

The huge mouse-coloured Brahmani bull of the ward was shouldering his way through the many-coloured crowd, a stolen plantain hanging out of his mouth. He headed straight for the shop, well knowing his privileges as a sacred beast, lowered his head, and puffed heavily along the line of baskets ere making his choice. Up flew Kim's hard little knee and caught him on his moist blue nose. He snorted indignantly, and walked away across the tram rails, his hump quivering with rage.

'See! I have saved more than the bowl will cost thrice over. Now, mother, a little rice and some dried fish atop—yes, and some vegetable curry.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

A growl came out of the shop, where a man lay.

'He drove away the bull', said the woman in an undertone.

'It is good to give to the poor'. She took the bowl and returned it full of rice.

'But my *yogi* is not a cow', said Kim gravely, making a hole with his fingers in the top of the mound. 'A little curry is good, and a fried cake, and a morsel of conserve would please him, I think.'

'It is a hole as big as thy head', said the woman fretfully. But she filled it none the less, with good steaming vegetable curry, clapped a fried cake atop, and a morsel of clarified butter on the cake, dabbed a lump of sour tamarind conserve at the side; and Kim looked at the load lovingly.

'That is good. When I am in the bazar the bull shall not come to this house. He is a bold beggar-man'.

'And thou?' laughed the woman. 'But speak well of bulls. Hast thou not told me that some day a Red Bull will come out of a field to help thee? Now hold all straight and ask for the holy man's blessing upon me. Perhaps too, he knows a cure for my daughter's sore eyes. Ask him that also, O thou Little Friend of all the World'.

Such was Kim's way of winning the hearts of the common people. He knew, as well as his creator, that beneath the seemingly impenetrable crust, they had a heart of gold. With a rare gift for the descriptive and the narrative, Kipling puts down the psychological traits and habits of speech of the people he had known and gives us insights into the working of their minds, immediately recognizable by all who know them. Kipling's treatment of the biggest reality in India—the life of the people so inextricably linked with their superstitions, their belief in the supernatural and their faith in religion—in the 'twin settings of the mountain and the plain',<sup>1</sup> is unsurpassed. The common people call Kipling's hero, 'Little Friend of all the World' and the Lama, equally intuitively calls him, 'Little Friend of the Stars', and 'Son of my Soul.' Kipling's Lama and his *chela* rove through 'this great and beautiful land of Hind' loving it and

<sup>1</sup> Nirad Chaudhury, *Encounter*, p. 50, Vol. VIII, No. 4, April 1957.

compelling us to love it. Here is Kipling's Lama on traditional Indian hospitality:

Just is the Wheel! All Hind for three years did me all honour. From the Fountain of Wisdom in the Wonder House to . . . a little child<sup>1</sup> playing by a big gun—the world prepared my road<sup>2</sup>.

Except for a brief sketch of the keeper of the Wonder House (Lahore Museum) in the first chapter, Englishmen do not play a conspicuous part in the story. Kipling gives us a satirical portrait of Bennett the English chaplain, and the Irish chaplain (his mind sees the 'Powers of Darkness' more often than the Light of Heaven!) though not as unpleasing is an unimpressive figure. The drummer boy who is friendly with Kim is not allowed any charm. Lurgon, 'the healer of sick pearls' is not 'pukka' and is a nondescript. Even Colonel Creighton, Kim's 'patron' is relegated to the background. The interest of the readers of *Kim* is thus focused on Kim's relations with the common people, the horse-dealer Mahbub Ali, the Bengalee Hurre Chander, the old Dawager Sahiba of Saharunpur, and the Tibetan Lama. Some of the minor characters—the Jat and the Woman of Shamlegh for example, are drawn with sympathy ('a gatherer of cow-dung and grass at Shamlegh, but still a woman of substance'<sup>3</sup>, she says to Kim).

On the day Kim saw the Lama, he felt that the Lama was 'entirely new to all his experience' and he wanted to 'investigate further, precisely as he would have investigated a new building or a strange festival in Lahore City'. The Lama was 'his trove and he purposed to take possession'. There was, about the Lama, something strange and elemental that Kim intuitively felt. The Buddhist Lama, engaged in his relentless quest to end the cycle of birth, old age and death and to attain the eternal peace of *Nirvana*<sup>4</sup>—symbolic of the mystic soul of the East—is indeed a unique and lovable creation of Kipling's. To the Lama, religion is a reality, a living force—something to be practised in his day to day life benefiting himself and his future life and also benefiting his fellow human beings in the present one; religion is not a dead abstraction, it is not the knowledge of dead secrets. The best defence against evil for him is to direct towards it the strength

<sup>1</sup> The 'little child' of course, is Kim.      <sup>2</sup> *Kim*, p. 373.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> See Nārada Thera, *The Dhammapada*, p. 6.



of benevolence for the Buddha had said. 'Let man overcome anger by love; let him overcome evil by good: May thy release come soon, brother!'<sup>1</sup> says the Lama to the snake which Kim with the 'white man's horror of the serpent' wanted to kill. His religion knows no distinctions of caste or creed; it consists in the strict observance of morality, for actions good or bad bear their fruit according to their own strength. The Lama however believes that good deeds are rewarded and evil deeds punished in a future life. All living beings, including the snake are upon the wheel of life until they find 'deliverance':

He (the snake) is upon the wheel as we are—a life ascending or descending—very far from deliverance. Great evil must the soul have done that is cast into the shape of a snake<sup>2</sup>.

Kim therefore followed the Lama like a shadow 'smelling the hot scented dust' loving the people and being loved by them. The Lama, with what Forster calls 'the secret understanding of the heart', accepted Kim as the 'Son of *his* Soul'. Absorbed in the humble duty of love and gratitude, from the first day of the quest to the last—'till the young branch bowed and well-nigh broke'—Kim 'begged in the town, set blankets for the Lama's meditation, held his weary head on his lap through noonday heats fanning away flies till his wrists ached, begged again in the evenings and rubbed the Lama's feet. . . .'<sup>3</sup> The relationship between the Lama and Kim is one of mystic kinship: Kim's complete self-abnegation and his devotion to the Lama reminds Indian readers of what Eliot has so succinctly put into his *Four Quartets*:

. . . do not think of the fruit of action  
Fare forward.

The Lama, overwhelmed by Kim's devotion says:

Never was such a chela . . . temperate, kindly, wise, of ungrudging disposition a merry heart upon the road, never forgetting, learned, truthful, courteous. Great is his reward.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Kim*, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 385-386.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 404-405.

As the quest comes to an end, the River of Wisdom gurgles past and the Lama is content to die 'crossing his hands upon his lap and smiling even as man may smile who has won salvation for himself and his beloved'<sup>1</sup>.

But a little before his nirvana<sup>2</sup> when, 'he was all things, having reached the Great Soul', the Lama says:

Let him (Kim) be a teacher; let him be a scribe—what matter?

He will have attained freedom at the end. The rest is illusion'<sup>3</sup>.

And Kim felt 'with an inaudible click the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. Things that rode meaningless in the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true—solidly planted upon the feet—perfectly comprehensible—clay of his clay, neither more nor less'<sup>4</sup>. Kim is faced with the dilemma: a life of action or a life of contemplation? Kim will probably find reality in the life of action. His words remind us once again of the passage in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Arjuna says<sup>5</sup>:

Oh Krishna, thou speakest in paradoxes, for first thou dost praise renunciation, and then praisest thou the performance of service through actions. Pray which of them has the greater merit?

And Krishna, after some hesitation, exhorts Arjuna and answers:

Verily I say unto thee, that of the two, the performance of service is preferable to the renunciation of action.

Kim has learned the virtue of performance of service through action and also has learned to overcome anger by love<sup>6</sup>, and evil by good. If the situation demanded he could take firm decisions and act

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 413.

<sup>2</sup> Implies extinction of the fire of passions and attainment of the bliss of union with the Universal.

<sup>3</sup> *Kim*, p. 407.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 403.

<sup>5</sup> Bonamy Dobree: *The Lamp and the Lute*, pp. 40-41.

Swami Chidbhavananda: *The Bhagavad Gita*, p. 210.

<sup>6</sup> See M. Hiriyantha: *The Quest After Perfection*, p. 39: . . . active then . . . involves self-affirmation . . . it also involves self-denial.

Also see p. 48.

quickly and decisively: when the Russian struck the Lama, Kim 'sent him (the Russian) rolling over and over down the hill' and 'banged his breathless foe's head against a boulder'. Kipling does not tell us how his hero—a golden youth by now—will shape himself. Involved as Kipling was in the development of his hero from being 'white' and therefore sitting astride the gun Zam Zammah 'in defiance of municipal orders' to the stage when the realisation that 'there is neither white nor black' comes to him, Kipling could not enact the conflict in his mind. Will Kim reciprocate the infinite goodwill people had so ungrudgingly and in such abundance shown him? Will he use his energy, his intelligence, and his capacity to see through humbug and pretence, to infuse a new life? Or will he use his abilities and his intimate knowledge of the working of the 'Hindu Mind' to support and strengthen a bureaucratic and oppressive government? Indian spiritual tradition tells us that 'each man is born to rediscover his own God-nature'.<sup>1</sup> Will Kim rediscover his God-nature? Kim does indeed try to find his identity, and his soul repeats again and again at crucial points in his quest:

I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?<sup>2</sup>

The answers to the questions raised in this paragraph will perhaps be found in what Kim himself says to the Lama:

Thou hast said there is neither black nor white. Why plague me with this talk, Holy One? . . . It vexes me. I am *not* a Sahib<sup>3</sup>.

But, Holy One, thou art innocent of all evil. May I be thy sacrifice<sup>4</sup>!

Thou leanest on me in the body (the ordering intelligence of the West)<sup>5</sup> but I lean on thee for some other things<sup>6</sup> (the Wisdom of the mystic Soul of the East).<sup>5</sup>

Kipling (in *Kim*) shows an unusual awareness of the possibilities of life and he seems to say that East and West must, in spite of the differences in racial and national outlook and differences in

<sup>1</sup> See the Introduction to *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* by Christopher Isherwood, p. xix.

<sup>2</sup> *Kim*, pp. 403, 264 and 167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 386.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 389.

<sup>5</sup> (The words in brackets are mine). See Tagore: *Nationalism*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Kim*, p. 371.



ideals, meet. He seems to ask his Western readers not to reject as absurd or irrational what they cannot understand. Kipling, realised that the West has to learn from India the 'knowledge of life' and that the East has to learn 'the vigour of European action and achievement'.<sup>1</sup> Kim probably will be a 'chain-man'—a bridge suspended for the passage of understanding between the two territories of Kipling's heart'.<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps safe to assume that his hero will not be lost in

The everyday affair of business, meals and clothing which  
Builds a Bulkhead 'twixt Despair and the Edge of Nothing'.

In reading *Kim* it is necessary to forget for a while the hackneyed phrase: Kipling is a 'jingo imperialist', and recall his appeal:

Seek not to question other than  
The books I leave behind.<sup>3</sup>

Wasn't it Kipling, who, in the voice of his brother 'who kneels to stone and brass heathernwise, hears his own unanswered agonies'?

But in my brother's voice I hear  
My own unanswered agonies.  
His God is as his Fates assign—  
His prayer is all the world's—and mine<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, p. 11. Also see *Kim*, 'Buddha at Kamakura', p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *The Definitive Edition of Rudyard Kipling's Verse*, p. 827.

<sup>4</sup> *Kim*, 'The Prayer', p. 358.

## WOMEN AND FICTION

C. VIMALA RAO

THE subject of my paper, I am afraid, is as vague as it is wide and arguments about it can be as unorganized as my paper. Still, it would be interesting to speculate what part women have played in the development of fiction, the writing and reading of which, especially, is sometimes referred to near-contemptuously by some high-brow, masculine critics as a 'feminine occupation'. Under cover of the ambiguity of the topic, I dare to make a few comments on why women have taken to the writing of fiction more than any other form of literature and how women readers have contributed to the popularising of this art of writing.

The novel form was obviously not taken as a serious literary genre by even the previous ages. Except for some rambling desultorily recounted stories of adventures like *Gargantua* and *Don Quixote*, which we now classify as fiction, we do not seem to find writers engaged seriously in the writing of novels till the 18th century. Even these two so-called novels are written in a spirit of fun and the writers make no effort to conceal the make-believe nature of their writings. This would not do and could not go on for a long time, considering the infinite possibilities of the novel, novel form. In Henry James's words, 'the novel had to take itself seriously for the public to take it so'. So it is only in recent times, from about the 18th century, when the possibilities of life also have been increased, that we find the novel coming into its own as a major literary form. It is surprising to find a sensitive artist like Ruskin declare in his *Sesame and Lilies* that the reading of fiction should on no account be part of the education of a lady, for novel-reading, according to him, appears to be wicked self-indulgence, vitiating the sensibility and corrupting it from feeling the realities of life. Writers like Thackeray have had their own asides in their books about their characters reading novels. Amelia and Becky recline on sofas and languorously go through sentimental fiction when they are awaiting the company of their young men in the evenings and Miss Crawley, the old, convalescing spinster drops her French

romance only when she hears that her brother, Sir Pitt Crawley is on his knees proposing to a governess and discovers that here is a situation of such intrigue as will outdo everything in her French novel. Listen to Chesterton and his bantering reference to women's preoccupation with fiction: 'If instead of trifling away my time over pamphlets about collectivism or co-operation, plunging for mere pleasure into the unhealthy excitement of theological debates with dons, or enjoying the empty mirth of statistics about Poland and Czechoslovakia, I had quietly sat at home doing my duty and reading every novel as it came out, I might be a more serious and earnest man than I am today. If instead of loitering to laugh over something merely because it happened to be laughable, I had walked stiffly and sternly on to the Circulating Library, and put myself under the tuition of our more passionate lady novelists, I might by this time be as intense as they'. If it is not this bantering or sarcastic tone, it is the down-right condemnatory tone of a correspondent who wrote to William Dean Howells: 'I have very grave doubts as to the whole list of magnificent things that you seem to think the novels have done for the race, and can witness in myself many evil things which they have done for me. Whatever in my mental make-up is wild and visionary, whatever is untrue, whatever is injurious, I can trace to the perusal of some work of fiction. Worse than that, they beget such high-strung and supersensitive ideas of life that plain industry and plodding perseverance are despised, and matter-of-fact poverty or everyday, common place distress, meets with no sympathy'.

Is the novel then merely an instrument of entertainment, mainly for brains with a feeble capacity, like the television or the radio? Does the reading of it involve no intellectual activity that it should be taken up when one wants to kill time or find relaxation from the strenuousness of living? Does one become a novel-addict just to escape from the world of reality and action just as one becomes a TV addict? After such adverse and depressing charges against the art of fiction, it is most reassuring to come to writers like D. H. Lawrence and Henry James who have seen the novel 'as no artificial, ingenious thing, but as having the large, free character of an immense and exquisite correspondence with life, converting the faintest hints of life, the very pulses of the air into revelations'. In the light of all this, I am sure



anyone's sarcastic reference to writing and reading of fiction as a 'feminine occupation' only would merely sound as empty superciliousness.

Pausing to think of it, the evolution of the novel in English has been to a remarkable extent seriously influenced by the women writers. Jane Austen, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, in their turns shaped it towards a precision, refinement and variety which was definitely lacking in the four major, men novelists of the 18th century. Is it not noteworthy that the first real novel, which is also among the greatest in the world was written by a woman? Lady Murasaki, a Japanese woman of an aristocratic family, wrote her fretted, long work, *The Tale of Genji* in six parts, as early as 1004. This young lady, who was widowed at an early age, took up a position in the entourage of the Empress Akiko and being a learned as well as an intelligent woman, kept a diary and wrote her historical-social-imaginative account of the Royal Court where she lived, simultaneously. At the age of 26 or even earlier, realizing with an uncanny maturity that the qualities of a work of art, especially of a work of fiction, combine the 'magnificent heritage of the painter and the philosopher', as Henry James was to put it later, she wrote with the clarity of a Japanese painter and infused her account of the fortunes and loves of the Japanese Royal Court with an undercurrent of skilfully managed philosophy of the fleetingness of human life as contrasted with the permanence of love, both human and divine, as symbolised in the evergreen Sacred Tree planted near Japanese shrines. After the delightfully attractive performance of the Japanese writer, we have an impressive group of women novelists to reckon with in the England of the 18th century. The years 1780 to 1830 are remarkable for the sudden spurt of a group of women novelists. There were the two novels of Mrs Elizabeth Inchbald, called *A Simple Story* and *Nature and Art*, written in 1791 and 1796 respectively, the themes of which are supposed to be moral themes of love and religion. Next, the title of Miss Hannah More's one novel is in itself self-revelatory; *Coelebs in Search of a Wife, comprehending observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals*. Charlotte Smith, a woman deserted by her husband, took to the writing of novels to support herself and her eight children and wrote *Celestina*, *The Old Manor House*, *Desmond*, *The Young Philosopher* and *The Banished Man*, the themes of most of which

are supposed to be drawn from her own life. Mrs Ople, a Quaker Philanthropist wrote her novels, *Father and Daughter* (1801) and *Adeline Mowbray* (1804) basing them on morality and religion. Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton is supposed to have combined religion, sentiment and criticism of housing and husbandry in Scotland (she was brought up on a Scottish farm) in her one book, the *Cottagers of Blenburnie*. Mrs Mary Brunton, the wife of a Professor of Oriental Languages in Edinburgh, wrote *Self-Control* (1811) and *Discipline* (1814), combining morality and satire. After this group of minor novelists, to whom I have drawn your attention to corroborate evidence that women have written fiction more than anything else, we have, of course, Maria Edgeworth, Lady Morgan, Fanny Burney, Mrs Radcliffe, and a little later, Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters and George Eliot.

Considering all their works, one wonders what it is that has made the woman writer choose the novel as medium more than poetry or drama or the essay. I wonder if any person writing a paper on 'Women and History' or 'Women and Poetry' or 'Women and Literary Criticism' could find as many names as I have culled that have directly dealt with the form and contributed something to its development personally. Historians or literary critics like Elizabeth Bowen or M. C. Bradbrook and Q. D. Leavis may have stood their own in the world of letters predominated by men but such intellectuals are few and far between and even they would be looked upon with suspicion as extraordinary creatures, blue-stockings. It is interesting to note that even Q. D. Leavis is famous for her criticism of fiction more than anything else, besides, of course, for being Mrs F. R. Leavis. Take even poets. I cannot recall at the moment any woman poet or dramatist whom our students study with as much diligence as they study the love poems of Heffrick or the lyrics of Shelley or the social dramas of Ibsen or Edward Albee. Even if there should be a poet like Sarojini Naidu we wonder what she is doing in the world of poetry and we remember her more for being one of the first Indian Women to enter politics rather than for her being a poet. Among the novelists, we have at least a Jane Austen and a Virginia Woolf on the syllabus, curiously both from comparatively recent times, that is, after the 18th century.

What were the women doing before the 18th century? According to Virginia Woolf herself, who makes some very pertinent



general observations in her essay on the theme of women and fiction, living on their emotions in their small, circumscribed domestic worlds, attending to the needs of their family and finding contentment in their quiet corners. This implies that it is a change in the world around them, a reshuffling of their own place in society that has instigated them to come out into the wider world and find that they can take part in the activities of this world also. If man can go to the moon in present times, a woman can at least hope to traverse a larger bit of the earth than her own home. So perhaps it would not be wrong to say that the breaking of the circumscribed social circle has meant a wonderful release to her personality which has shown itself in this new outburst of self-expression. And fortunately for the woman, this seeking and finding of self-identity and individuality has coincided with the inherent advantages of the form of the novel. The novel, with its yet unexplored potentialities for development, was still in its early stages waiting for the touch of the propitious hand to give it a shape and a name.

Another obvious overwhelming reason for women to take up this form was perhaps they did not have to enter into competition with the already existing stalwarts in the field as they would certainly have to if they had taken up drama or poetry or philosophy or literary criticism. Moreover, it was a new ground for new women to explore and leave their mark upon and certainly they would not allow the lustre of their new freedom to be dulled by imitating or following the men. They came upon the form in its early stages and made it their own to a considerable extent.

The novel itself is a genre which allows for a great deal of freedom in its handling. It may be impure in its form and include a fragment of history, philosophy, drama, psychology, in fact, everything. The truth is, one does not know what a pure novel is, for the very impure element may give a novel its quality. It has no limits of length or rules of rhyme and requires no particular or previous training on the part of the person using it. No experience would be out of its range and no style would be out of place in the novel. Hence it could include the horror-striking imagination of a Mary Shelley or the cooings of romantic bliss of a Mrs Henry Wood. It is no doubt true that the freedom offered by the form has the inherent danger of loosing itself into chaos and incoherence. An all-inclusiveness can merge into a



diffusiveness. But even a diffusiveness can have a place in the elastic scope of the novel—in fact, it is the diffusiveness that is allowed that strengthens the hands of the woman novelist. The nature of a woman's mind and work are diffuse, without a beginning or an end or sometimes even a logic. There are no demands of concentrated effort or concentration of experience in the form of the novel as there would be in poetry or drama. A woman can fulfil the commitments of her role in the home and still keep up the writing of her novel. She need not grumble to lay aside her writing when the call comes for her to attend to some prosaic routine chore. Organising or serving a dinner or studying the subtly forming personality in a child in her life or writing about them in her novel, she is capable of taking this all-inclusiveness in her stride and handling the diffusiveness without losing her grip. It would not be wrong to say that more than a poet or a dramatist, the novelist must expose himself to life and draw from the sources of life more directly. A certain amount of documentation and description of details that go into the writing of a novel must have their basis in a real, moving, active life. The art of the novelist can never be the ivory-tower art. Reality is the spring-board from which one has to rise in the art of fiction. Truly, according to Flaubert, the artistic, ideal verity comes after the experience of the real verity. Women, by nature, see, hear and talk more exuberantly than the men. Being at the centre of the verities of life nothing escapes them. Keen observation, a quick perception, a fine sensibility and an intuitive insight into life are the strong points of any novelist. Women novelists have made use of some of these natural gifts in the writing of their novels. Jane Austen needed not to travel beyond the drawing-room of her father's home to write her delightful books and an Anita Desai needs no dramatic encounter with the west to enable her to write novels of human relationships. This faithfulness to a small world and the depiction of it in detail may not appear as impressive as the achievements of D. H. Lawrence or Joseph Conrad and may bring the charge of narrowness and lack of vision against the women novelists. This cannot be defended except on the ground that here, alas, is the limitation of natural experience. Who knows that if the range of experience expands for women, as it has socially from the previous centuries to the present times, the themes of their novels and the style of their

writing may become more powerful than what they are now. Already this imperceptible change in the themes of the women novelists is taking place.

Let me illustrate this change by coming now to the situation of women novelists in our own country. In India, we may not find any woman novelist writing with fulfilment before Independence. Toru Dutt wrote one novel, *Bianca*, supposed to be about a Spanish maiden in 1879, but one wonders if it can be taken into account as an Indian novel even though Toru Dutt was an Indian. If there were other women writers in India they were foreigners like Rumer Godden, Flora Annie Steel, Maud Diver, Christine Weston and Cecelie Leslie writing in their own English consciousness about their second home, India. It is only after Independence that the Indian woman has stepped out into a wider social world and begun to be conscious of her own personality. So history repeats itself in India and now we have writers like Padmini Sen Gupta, Kamala Markandaya and Santha Rama Rau seizing upon the novel form and daringly exploring the possibilities of self-expression through this medium. Daringly because leaping the stage of being novelists of domestic life and narrow interests and depicting storms in tea-cups in the style of many earlier women novelists, the Indian writers have plunged into the wider world with a deep dive. Stepping out from the sheltered precincts of their homes, they have entered into the tumbling world of politics, social problems, race relations and many other complexities. They have travelled a long way from a Lady Murasaki, who, writing delicately about a certain question of succession in the Japanese Royal Court and inadvertently criticising public affairs, checks herself saying. . . 'but such matters are not for a woman's pen and I feel I must apologize for having said even so much as this' (*Sacred Tree*, Double Day Anchor, p. 12). Gone are the days already of the narrowness of outlook and meticulousness of style. The socially, (first politically), emancipated woman has opened her eyes wider than ever in India and is stepping into a world which was hitherto not in her ken. After the sweeping, larger-than-life proportions of Emily Bronte and the microscopically minute representations of Jane Austen, it is extremely interesting to come to the real-life dimensions of ordinary men and women of our own time in the novels of the Indian women novelists. Reading the works of



Kamala Markandaya or Santha Rama Rau, one wonders at the courage with which they explore and organize their identities, the boldness with which they deal with themes of love and sex. Perhaps it is their encounters with the west that have given them this courage and confidence. Whatever it is, one can say that the work of the Indian women novelists has come of age extraordinarily early. Even in style, the massiveness of a George Eliot or meticulousness of a Jane Austen has given place to the sensitive original use of the language. There has yet been no Virginia Woolf experimenting with technique, though, among the Indian women novelists.

Perhaps the best analysis of how the Indian woman has emerged into a novelist can be seen implicitly and explicitly in Santha Rama Rau's more than autobiographical account, *Gifts of Passage*. In many paragraphs she draws our attention to how she really became emancipated and shaped herself into a writer, shedding the bonds of social restriction gradually but firmly, sometimes even with defiance. One of her friends even goes so far as to call her 'Miss Emancipation'. This can be said to be the story of many of these women novelists who, in Miss Rau's words, 'have an indelible engagement with India' and who are "modern" and defensive about it and "traditional" and proud of it'. Through this small group of novelists the story of the reality of India is finding credence among the novel-reading public (except, perhaps, for one or two novels like Kamala Markandaya's *Possession*).

Let me hasten to add at this point that it is not my intention to establish a baseless claim that women have contributed to fiction more than men and they are more particularly suited to being novelists than men. All that one can say is, that of all the forms of literature, fiction has proved itself the best medium through which woman can express herself and through which she can be best expressed. Consider some of the greatest novels in English literature: they are about a Madame Bovary or an Anna Karenina, Emma or Portrait of a Lady and it is Becky Sharp and Scarlett O'Hara or Savitri that stand out in our memory more than the male characters. In drama, perhaps, we would remember a Macbeth or a Lear more than anyone else.

Can we then leave out the sarcastic note in the description of fiction as a 'feminine occupation' and seriously maintain that



fiction is undoubtedly a serious, feminine occupation? Perhaps yes. Can we dare to go a step further and imply by 'feminine,' a sensibility that need not necessarily be present in women only and trace the presence of it even in men who have written novels? According to my own observation, novelists like D. H. Lawrence, Henry James and E. M. Forster and in our own country, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand appear to have almost a feminine comprehension of life, a delicate, tender, artistic understanding bordering on the sentimental and the superstitious, believing in the philosophy of the 'Holiness of the Heart's affections'. With this advantage of super-sensitivity added to their natural range and depth of wider experience, it is no wonder that some of the best novels written are still by men.

I shall now presume to say a word or two about the influence of women readers on fiction. Whenever Thackeray addresses the reader in *Vanity Fair*, as he very frequently does, it is more often than not to say 'Ladies' or 'you, my gentle reader'. The correspondence which he receives criticising the serials of his novels appearing in journals is on pink perfumed paper in a pretty hand-writing. Do women constitute a larger part of fiction's audience? It appears to be so, at least of commercial fiction, which seems to be the major inheritance of the 20th century literary world. Novelettes and romances appear mostly in women's journals and on top of the shopping basket, every fortnight or month, depending on the frequency of the publication, there is always the issue of the latest journal. Most of these modern novels appear in periodicals as social themes, with the emotional and personal predicaments involving romance, love, marriage and human relationships can be serialised without much loss to the intensity of mood or continuity of effect. Writers like Lucilla Andrews, Lucy Walker, Denise Robins, Daphne Du Maurier, Marie Correlli, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, who combine sentimental, romantic tales with gossip, an easy style and the excitement of scandals with even a few corpses thrown in, find a large audience among women for their serials. It is a curious psychology that attracts a woman towards a journal. She can buy it cheap, imagining that she is within her shopping budget and read the story in snatches at a casual, interesting pace. It is strange that a woman would read a magazine but not a newspaper or a long novel, more often than not. A magazine, with

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its glossy, artistic get-up, teasing the imagination from its tantalizing cover and straining on least curiosity and anticipation throughout its pages of pictures, attractive advertisements, serials and a variety of exciting tit-bits, has found a large clientele of women readers at the present time. I do not mean to say that women read only the novelette serials. If they were to read anything at all in their moments of leisure, one can make a reasonable guess that they would go to a novel rather than to philosophy, or poetry or history. Sometimes it is distressing to find even women with a fairly high, formal education indulging in the habit of novel-reading to the detriment of all other serious types of intellectual interests. It was with great surprise that I learnt that the principal of a women's college in a big city confined her reading mostly to the stories of Denise Robins, Lucilla Andrews etc. (the reigning queens of the romantic novelettes), that is, if she could read anything at all besides her administrative correspondence. Anyway, without keeping up the pretence too long, I suppose one would say that woman read fiction more than anything else because it makes for a generally less taxing and more enjoyable type of reading helping them to keep up the connection between their own world and the world in the book. To them, reading fiction is perhaps an exhilarating but reassuring paradox of an escape from as well as a reminder of, the life around them as we saw that even the writing of it was.





## EAST-WEST ENCOUNTER: K. S. VENKATARAMANI

H. H. ANNIAH GOWDA

IN *After Gandhiji: Our Problems*, published in 1948 K. S. Venkataramani, discussing Indian genius in Politics, wrote:

‘Before British Raj came, politics in India, like the fence in an orchard, took its modest place as a sentinel on duty and carried out its main function of protecting the soul of Indian culture and civilisation. A true fence, a two-dimensional takes up no lateral space; it is vertical, steel-framed and ever vigilant. . . . But alas today Democracy involves the sacrifice often in more negative waste of 20 to 25 per cent of our active man-hours! What a state of affairs under the inspiration of the West!’

It is my contention that K. S. Venkataramani, if not inspired by Western politics, was certainly inspired by the English, and his quiet and ascetic temperament absorbed the best in English and he became one of the pioneers of a new genre of literature produced by Indians in English. When one talks of East-West encounter, it is in the direction of language, literature and philosophy. The terms East and West are relative and I use them mindful of all the connotations that go with them. In the book from which I have just quoted, Venkataramani speaks of *nishkama karma* as selected lines of *Dharma* pursued in literature and politics. He talks of using leisure creatively and the mode of widening the range of consciousness and self-realisation and the Indian image found distinct expression in the writings of K. S. Venkataramani, nationalism being laced into his very heartstrings. He exposes the rural idyllic picture of India and stirs our deepest emotions. Flaubert wrote to Louis Colet in 1853: ‘What seems to me the highest thing in Art (and most difficult) is not to make people laugh or cry, nor to fill them with desire or rage, but to do what nature does—that is, make people dream’. Venkataramani makes us dream of old India which is fast disappearing—the India before and after Gandhi, awakened to the consciousness of the right to rule. But he does not forget that his object is to make people know about the behaviour of the people in a society dominated by an arrogant foreign power. In doing this he is guided by an avowed moral purpose. But his characters and



situations are not primarily vehicles of moral philosophy, as those of Johnson's *Rasselas*. He is the voice of Renascent India.

K. S. Venkataramani made his entry into the world of Indo-English fiction with his *Paper Boats* (1921), a title that suggests something of 'lambishness', revealing quaint humour. Soon after in 1923 appeared *On the Sand Dunes* which are philosophical reflections on life in the manner of Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*. Four years later came a novel about India's rural life: *Murugan, The Tiller*, which made him known to the English-speaking world as a writer of standing. It was quickly followed by his second novel, *Kandan, The Patriot* (1932), dedicated to 'The Unknown Volunteers in India's fight for Freedom'.

Venkataramani's work should be read in the chronological order. In between *Murugan, The Tiller* and *Kandan, The Patriot* came *The Next Rung, A Day with Sambhu* (1929), *Talks to a Boy, the Renascent India, Dr. Annie Besant: A Tribute*. In 1948 he wrote *After Gandhiji: Our Problems*, where he pleads for *advaita manobhava* in politics; diversity and variety are not for war but for mutual enrichment.

K. S. Venkataramani, who was highly responsive to national sentiment and identified himself with the great movement for the emancipation of the country, started his literary career with light sketches collected in *The Paper Boats*. He says in the Preface, 'If ever my *Paper Boats* reach distant ports I owe it to their captaincy. The cargo is mine, mostly of strange and fragile flowers, but the difficult navigations is theirs, of this flower without sail or blast'. The very title suggests the simple sketches with an eye for oddities in human nature. The contemplation of the incongruities of life form the very basis and core of these sketches. One has only to read sketches like 'The Indian Beggar', and 'The Fisherman' 'My Neighbour' to understand fully the main drift of these fragile boats. A fleet of paper boats are set afloat on the lake of the mind's eye. The Indian beggar, perhaps for the first time in Indo-English fiction, is given a status:

'The Indian beggar is the most interesting of the world's ragged men. Of all the numerous progeny of poverty, he is the eldest-born. Thus entitled to the virtue of the good law of primogeniture he has inherited the vast estate of world's wretchedness. He is a wayward and wandering fellow. He is a melancholy bag. He trembles like a tear-drop on the lotus-leaf of life'.

Colourful and evocative phrases establish the beggar as a creature demanding our compassion. The sketch 'The Fisherman' recalls E. V. Lucas or A. G. Gardiner whose sketches reveal a remarkable blend of humour, irony and sympathy. The Tamils, who claim in support of their being the first-born, the earliest text-book on grammar, are the most ancient anglers and would have been glad to present Noah's Ark with the hook and the rod. The author muses on Indian cricket which to him is a picturesque cousin of the English game; the sketches on the Hindu Temple and the Hindu Pilgrim are delightful to read. His displeasure with the invasion of our time-honoured customs is also clearly seen: 'The temple is the be-all and end-all of our existence. But the European civilisation is fast making inroads into our beliefs'. Sketches like 'My Grandmother, the Queen of the House' and 'My Little Arunalam' give us a fairly clear insight into Indian life and customs in the twenties. A reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* commented thus: '*Paper Boats* is a book wherewith to beguile an hour over the fire and if you are interested in India you may learn things that you did not know before'.

His prose-poem *On the Sand Dunes* (1923) is tender both in theme and treatment: 'These sand-dunes are the richest place for reverie; to chew the cud in peace and leisure. But for the cruel call and empty needs of civilised life I would fain spend all my days from dawn to dawn betwixt the boundless sea and the winding river'.

The Englishman saw a slice of life set afloat on the native waters by an Indian. The artist in K. S. Venkataramani rapidly developed within this genre. *The Next Rung*, which is also a collection of sketches, shows his knowledge of human affections and manners. It is divided into two parts—'A Bird's Eye View' containing essays on government, property, education, science, cooking and clothing. 'The Next Rung' pleads for sex-sublimation directly leading to cosmic consciousness. The Second Part deals with the renascent India. By this time Venkataramani had come under the spell of the national movement: 'The vast creative force of the Renaissance spreads over the Indian sky seeking expression like the majestically rolling and full monsoon clouds'. He wants to give it direction and his ideal world is sketched. To the West India has a message, the message of peace. India is like a captive bird, she cries for 'Swaraj'. 'It is a Swaraj



with a message of minimum Government, Peace, Love, Rest and Harmony to the whole world'. All this is past history but it is worth reading. Running through these sketches is a sense of wistful regret that the old order and charm of these villages is fast disappearing. 'In the wake of civilisation new tastes and habits are being acquired which are neither nourishing nor necessary. In return for clothes from Manchester, soaps from Paris, sugar from Java, matches from Sweden and kerosene oil from America another thirty per cent of the food stuffs of the village are exchanged'. He disapproves of drink shops and he wants the Indian village to be a bright crystal reflecting a great civic ideal. His views are searchingly critical charged with intense moral fervour, so characteristic of the spirit of the times. \*

Venkataramani's intimate knowledge of the life of the rising middle class is revealed in the collection of stories with the title *Jatadharan and other Stories* (1937). The characters who fill these stories are country dwellers, people incapable of doing spectacular things. Their sphere is one of limited possibilities. A countryside teacher, an advocate, a porter—certainly not people cast in the heroic mould! As representatives of a fast disappearing age, they receive a fresh lease of life in the pages of Venkataramani. They are individuals as well as types. They have their own lives, their own complexities and inner conflicts—all hitched on to a didactic tail, which might seemingly take away the value of a work of art. Venkataramani's own view is worth quoting: 'I develop a didactic tail which my compassion for all life refuses to clip. Some like a tail. I like it: many don't. Our refined citizen blessed with sartorial excellences does not like a tail, especially a tail which would like to wag. As in life, so in story'.

There is progress in the development of characters from his early sketches. Greater attention is paid to details and the sketches are instinct with the author's sense of humour. 'The goddess of small-pox who had cradled Jatadharan at birth for twentyone days gave him the most beautiful cradle-gift, an introspective mind'. This pyol teacher of Kalalani always dreaded marriage: 'Marriage for me, mother, would but break two souls—an earthen pot that floats down the river of life best reaches the sea unblest by the touch of another'. Disappointed in high hopes of becoming a collector, he becomes a humble pyol teacher and a worshipper of Goddess Mariamman. The book reveals the



author's deep insight into the life of the humble villagers, their customs, practices, and their highly superstitious nature seen in their refusal to get vaccinated against small-pox since they looked upon the Englishman's vaccination as an act of blasphemy against Goddess Mariamman. The story called 'Collision' has for its central figure a rich Mudaliar, proud and boastful because he signs his name in such a way in Tamil that it is easily mistaken for English. Ramanujan, the ticket collector at Mayavaram, becomes a voracious reader of books, thanks to the Higginbothams Bookstall and to the friendly relations he kept up with its clerk, who shared with him the decent view that books are primarily meant for those who read, and only secondarily for sale to those who buy but do not read. Kittu, the schoolmaster, another interesting character in these sketches, runs away to Madras, put to a sense of shame by the attempted suicide of his wife in the village.

The underlying note of all these stories is the favourite theme of 'Back to the Villages', the result undoubtedly of the impact of Gandhian philosophy on the author. Venkataramani's characters distrust science and ambition. Irulesan of 'In Quest of Power' returns to his native village after a fortnight's absence and speaks nostalgically about it. 'The monsoon had begun on the Western Ghats, the river was flowing full, the merry foam hissing little eddies. The village tanks smiled with plenty. The trees waved their branches expectantly. The breeze was cold and gentle. The children playing in the streets greeted me with smiles songs and shouts. My mother called me home with joy. I flung my shirt and towel into the greeting arms of my reading chair and joined with a wild though elderly cry of joy the children's fairy land in the streets, where everyone was in quest of nothing, where life was a play as motiveless as the waves that ride for joy from sea to shore'. Muthu of 'Destiny' who is taken out of his village surroundings and put to school at Mayavaram with *eclat* in the true aristocratic style, has his proclivities towards the babbling waters of the Cauvery or the chirping notes of a bird. He tells his mother that city life is ruinous to all but hotel-keepers. 'Let us go back to our beautiful village—the village of my childhood—and lead there a lovely and a really useful life, a life of service to the lowly and the suffering'. The sentiment is Wordsworthian. Luke in the Lake Poet's 'Michael' falls an easy prey to the temp-

tations of the city of London. Venkataramani's Muthu gets away from the city before its corrupting influence touches him. Sometimes his characters border on the caricature as in *A Bride Waits*. On the whole we feel that Venkataramani is quite successful as a writer recreating the Indian scene, though there is a certain amorphousness perhaps excusable in an early writer writing in English.

*Murugan, the Tiller* is his first attempt at novel writing—a passionate plea for a return to nature. One of the earliest novels by an Indian writer in English, it is a literary expression of political experiments in this country, and a direct expression of the author's experience of life around him. The didactic note of the novel is indicated in its descriptive title. The hollowness of artificial life is exposed and the beauty of rural life highlighted. Murugan, the main character, Ramachandran and his wife Janaki are all geared to develop this image. Ramachandran, or Ramu of Alavanti village, 'a twice failed B.A. and a lord of a seven acres', is set in contrast to Kedari, a flourishing High Court advocate of vaulting ambition. Murugan is the symbol of love and devotion to land temporarily spoilt by the desire to earn more money. Later, however, he returns to his land and regains his balance. All this happens under the philosophic guidance of Ramachandran.

Though not the best *Murugan, the Tiller* is the most popular of Venkataramani's works; historically it is important as it enables us to fix the author in the line of Indian writers in English. Living in stirring times, Venkataramani in this novel concerns himself with agrarian problems, highlighting the evils of Western education, the Rule of Law and the racial differences in the country.

The opening of the novel strikes the key note: 'The Cauvery is a majestic river at the village of Alavanti. On the right bank, not far away from the residential quarters, nestled the beautiful little coconut garden of Ramachandran. Therein lay the ancestral cottage of Murugan in peace and security for over seven generations. The garden was the most coveted thing in the village and Murugan was the most valued of hereditary tillers of the soil of Alavanti'.

This is a rustic paradise and the characters are set against this background—Ramachandran or Ramu, the Friend, Guide and Philosopher of the other characters, Murugan, the typical son of



the soil, and Kedari, the ambitious and prosperous advocate. Kedari and Ramu are contrasted. 'Kedari had drive, ambition and energy; Ramu philosophy, gentility and charm'. Ramu the author's favourite character is central in the novel. Much against his will this failed B.A. becomes an ill-clad camp clerk of Mr Cadell, M.A., I.C.S. His hard work, devotion to duty and absolute sincerity win him quick promotions to places of responsibility including those of controlling bandits. Wherever he goes admiration and affection accompany him. Such is his power of persuasion that he draws the criminals to the path of peace and makes them settle down to a life of quiet at Nagalapur. Murugan, who had accidentally become the Chief of the Bandits, says: 'Give us each some acres of land and a law. We will work day and night for the production of the wealth of the world. We will grow oil seeds, cotton and corn. . . . Clap us not in jail. It rewards neither'. Ramu, who is a wholesome influence on others, says: 'All wicked men of the world are wicked only till the higher 'flowering' impulse is set free by an unknown, unseen, unpremeditated breath of wind or ray of light from God'. Ramu is sometimes too good to be true. He overshadows all others by his moral stature, and in a way the story is presented through him. The persons who come under his influence, though they play minor roles, gain considerable stature: even the women—Kokilam, Ponni, Sita—derive comfort and consolation from him. Kedari's success brings him no happiness; but the magic presence of Ramu gives him a measure of tranquillity.

It is an idealised rural picture that we get in *Murugan, the Tiller*. The characters belong rather to the world of imagination than to the world of reality. With the exception of Kedari the characters appear to have been intended to illustrate certain ideas born of Venkataramani's humanitarian outlook. They are charming, witty and consciously virtuous. Sometimes we get the feeling that we are once again in the world of the Moralities of the Middle Ages.

*Kandan, the Patriot* has for its background the stirring and trouble-fraught period of the thirties. The novel begins with a description of a toddy-shop at Akkur.

'Ranga, life is more serious than you and I thought of it while at Oxford. The call of the country for me at any rate silenced the call of home and love, of leisured, rich, idle contemplative



and pretending life'. These are the words of Rajeswari, the daughter of a millionaire, to R. S. Rangaswamy, the Assistant Collector, and strike the key-note of the theme of the novel. Kandan, an Oxonian who had given a brilliant account of himself at the I.C.S. Examination, suffering a disappointment in love, transforms that love into the higher love of all beings, and devotes himself to public service in the village of Tillayadi.

The three main characters: Ramaswamy, Kandan and Rajeswari are all Oxford graduates, who devote themselves to the task of village reconstruction. They represent what was vaguely termed Indian intelligentsia, mixing with the masses and working for the cause of freedom. R. S. Rangaswamy, who is called Rangan, is the main focus. He belongs to the class of those who gave up the Indian Civil Service as a protest against foreign imperialism. He is in love with Rajeswari, his old friend and contemporary at Oxford. She is the mainspring of several of his activities. It is she who makes him travel third, although he had a first class ticket, leaving his luggage in the first class compartment. 'First class for the luggage and third class for men!'

Rajee inspires Rangan: 'Resign your job and join the Congress ranks, and work for the masses. If only you have seen the brimming tears of sorrow running down their pale cheeks! Brave imprisonment and *lathi* charge and carry the flag of our country to undreamt of heights of honour—then this frail hand and body is yours for ever—so that the children sprung of our loins may see the light of day in a free country'. These words and the rising tidal wave of patriotism inspire him and his decision to resign comes, when he is transferred as a Settlement Officer to Palani Hills. Kandan, like Ramachandran of *Murugan, the Tiller* is also an idealised character. He works among the toddy addicts—Nandan, Mookhan, Kallari, Irullan, Karupan and Karian—and becomes their friend, philosopher and guide. He speaks to them about the evils of intemperance, and seeks to educate them and help them lead better lives. It is of course very difficult for these men to give up their habit; but whenever they see Kandan, the reforming saint, a ray of hope radiates in their faces. 'Kandan is the man to make men of us'. Let us follow his works',—that is the refrain of their song. The village intrigues, in which Chockalinga Mudaliar, the lord of the thousand acres, involves the innocent villagers, the loot and arson of his

property by the poor, and the British system of spying on Indian officers are vividly sketched. Numerous sketches of Neelakshi, who finds the upbringing of her five sons a difficult job, all of them finding matriculation examination too wide and disastrous a ditch for their jumping power, Padma who had sent his text books down the temple tank to consecrate some patriotic vow he had taken for public service, the students addressing big meetings in English, Tamil and Hindi with quotations from the *Bhagavad Gita*, to protest against the action of the Government of India, and the ever present difficulties of third class travellers—all add greatly to the value and interest of the novel. The behaviour of the drunkard Karian beating his wife, making advances to Kamakshi on the road adds another dimension to the novel. It also offers glimpses of the meetings held in defiance of the prohibitory order, at one of which, Kandan is killed. Rajee declares: 'Kandan has died a patriot saint. Let his *samadhi* rest by the side of the tank in the very coconut garden where a toddy shop once stood. Let an *ashrama* grow there for rural service, for the uplift and joy of the million poor'. Kandan becomes a martyr; many arrests are made under Section 144. In an Epilogue young Padma discusses *ananda* which springs from action; and the author defines *Gnani* as the one without a second.

The ending takes a mystical turn; it lifts us from the realm of literature to that of philosophy. It reads like a treatise on *Vedanta*. The Epilogue is not an added ornament. The author maintains perfect balance between the spirit of Kandan, Raman and Rajee who stand for the national movement and that of the Government of India, which tries to curb the surge of nationalism. Herein lies the excellence of this novel.

In his work Venkataramani does not turn away from his customary interest—the effect of moral standards on the individual in his relations with society. The drift of the author's mind is unmistakable—the only natural life is the rural life untouched by sophistication. In this respect he is close to those idealists at the beginning of the present century who were making conscious attempts to build up an image of India. He is not unaware of the conflict of cultures—Occidental and Oriental. As far back as 1910 Tagore touched upon this in *Gora*. Most of the Bengali writers, Sarat Chandra Chatterji (1876-1938) and Premchand (1880-1936) and Bibhutibhushan Banerji (1899-1950) were

all concerned with the rising middle class society exposed to the winds of culture from the West. Bibhutibhushan Banerji's *The Woodlander* (1938) is close to the work of Venkataramani in that both of them advocate a return to nature.

It is more by accident, perhaps, than by design that Bibhutibhushan Banerji, the author of *Aranyak* (1938) wrote his *Pather Panchali* (1929) two years after *Murugan, the Tiller*.

The Novel as an art form in India is about a hundred years old and Venkataramani's contribution is both significant and conspicuous. To read him is to experience a slice of life now threatened by the ravages of the machine. The very thought that such idyllic life was once possible is a source of pleasure to the reader. K. S. Venkataramani's lively, if sometimes wordy, sense of humour enlivens all his works, from casual sketches to full-length novels. The Tamilian, like the Irishman, is proverbial for his bitingly boisterous humour.

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# RAJA RAO'S KANTHAPURA: AN ANALYSIS

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH

I READ in some book on the Novel, which I now forget, that Professor Emile Legouis was examining a student in English and asked him what he thought of education at English and American universities. The student, it seems, replied that what impressed him most was the amount of reading expected and accomplished by students in those universities. And Professor Legouis is reported to have remarked 'Yes, yes, they read, read, read'. And after a minute's pause, during which he mused over what he said, he added 'It would appear that they found something magical in reading'. Upon this, the critic who quotes the conversation has commented very appropriately: 'There is nothing magical in reading, it is in re-reading that some magic may lie'. Most of us read simply for pleasure, because we are not re-readers. Of course, so few, so very few of the novels, published in the world today are worth re-reading. One of those few novels I have gone back to is Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* of which I will attempt an analysis in the hope of offering an elucidation of certain important facts in and about the novel so as to put the readers in possession of these facts, as I have understood them.

There are at least three strands of experience in the novel: the political, the religious and the social, and all the three are woven inextricably into the one complex story of Kanthapura. Kanthapura is not any Indian village, but a village in the State of Mysore, in the valleys of Himavathy, 'there it lies curled up like a child on its mother's lap'. It has 'four and twenty houses' in the Brahmin quarter, but it has a Pariah quarter too, a Potters' quarter, a Weavers' quarter and a Sudra quarter. There might have been 90 or 100 huts in all these. Its multiple structure need not surprise the readers. It is unfortunate that in this land of villages so few of our writers write about the village. Is it because our writers themselves live in towns which have so many 'problems' to write on, problems which absorb all their attention?

Or is it that life in the villages is eventless and so our villages remain unsung and unknown to the rest of the world? I don't know how village life gets expressed in our regional languages but I know I can't think of another authentic account of village life among novels written in the English language. Precisely these factors may have served as a stimulus to writing in one like Raja Rao who knows his village, if any writer knows it, from the inside. And to one who knows his village so well as he does it acquires an unusual complexity—a complexity of the kind to which readers of fiction in the English language have not been accustomed to. Observe the way in which the village comes to life: its Brahmin quarters, the Sudra quarters and the Pariah quarters. He has seen the houses and known the inhabitants by their names as only one who has lived with them knows: Postmaster Suryanarayana with his two storeyed house, Patwari Nanjundiah who had 'even put glass panes to the windows'; the *thotti* house of pock-marked Sidda (the inner courtyard in a village was status symbol) which had 'a big veranda, large roof and a granary'; waterfall Venkamma who 'roared day and night'; and Zamindar Bhatta who has gone on adding peasants' lands to his own domain; the young idealistic 'corner house Moorthy' who is destined to shake the village out of its complacency and put it on the map of Mysore and India; and 'the nine-beamed house Patel Range Gowda', the vigorous peasant chief of the village wedded to the soil from immemorial generations, 'a Tiger to the authorities'. These stand out among the men and women of Kanthapura. As for the rest, one could not say, the novelist tells us at the end of the introductions of his 'dramatis personae' whether they were rich or poor—'they were badly dressed and always paid their taxes after several reminders'. It is obvious he knows them just as well but if he does not individualise them it is obviously because he doesn't like to crowd his canvas. But even then he would not dismiss without a thought for he has felt for them in their wretchedness. It is by means of such concrete particulars that the inhabitants and their residences are known to us and these are helpful in visualising the scene of action.

Right in the centre of the village is a temple dedicated to Kenchamma, Great Goddess, Benign one. A river, a hill, and a temple with the presiding deity of the village complete the picture. There is a folk song which evokes in us images

and attitudes as to what Kenchamma means to the people of Kanthapura:

Kenchamma, Kenchamma,  
Goddess benign and bounteous  
Mother of Earth, blood of life  
Harvest queen, rain crowned  
Kenchamma, Kenchamma  
Goddess benign and bounteous

Kenchamma is in the centre of the village, forms the still-centre of their lives and makes everything meaningful. A marriage, a funeral, sickness, death, ploughing, harvesting, arrests, release—all are watched over by Kenchamma. There may be small-pox or influenza around but you make a 'vow to the goddess, the next morning, you wake up and you find the fever has left you'. 'Didn't she kill the demon who killed their children and molested their wives'? And so she will continue to protect them come wind, come rain, come any distress. While there is a lot of sympathy for the peasant's faith there is no identification of the novelist with it. There is even a tinge of irony in his description which surprisingly makes for authenticity of the thing he describes.

It is true this back-of-beyond village slumbering for centuries suddenly comes to life thanks to the non-violent non-co-operation movement of Gandhi in the twenties. It is in the handling of this theme that the novelist quickens it to activity and thus gives us an insight into the appalling social conditions of our villages as also the values that have preserved our people against flood, fire, famine and exploitation from within and from without—and more than all, that incomparable manner in which Gandhi tapped the deeply religious and spiritual resources of our people living in the remotest parts of India and built up a national movement in one life-time.

Remember Nehru's description of the impact of Gandhi on the Indian scene in *The Discovery of India*:

'He was like a powerful current of fresh air, a beam of light that pierces the darkness, like a whirlwind that upsets many things, but most of all the working of men's minds'—a veritable Ode to the West Wind, incidentally, better done in prose than in Shelley's verse. Read it together with the inscription from the



Gita on the inner title page of the novel, and you will get a key with which to unlock the novel. For the entire action comes out as an artist's enactment of Nehru's image of the impact of Gandhi on the Indian scene together with a hundred particulars that illumine many hidden spots in the life of the country during that period.

But it is no political novel any more than is Gandhi's movement a mere political movement. It portrays as no government-sponsored or foundation-patronised history of the Freedom Movement does—the tomes which are called histories of the Freedom Movement are as lifeless as the monolithic monuments erected to the memory of the unknown soldier; nor for that matter does any book of this scope and size that I have read in English on this theme picture so vividly, truthfully and touchingly the story of the resurgence of India under Gandhi's leadership: its religious character, its economic and social concerns, its political ideals precisely in the way Gandhi tried to spiritualize politics, the capacity for sacrifice of our people in response to the call of one like Gandhi—not the spectacular sacrifice of the few chosen ones who later became India's rulers but the officially unchronicled, little, nameless, unremembered acts of courage and sacrifice of peasants and farm hands, students and lawyers, women and old men, thanks to whom Gandhi's unique experiment gathered momentum and grew into a national movement. While the author is quite involved in it, his stay abroad six thousand miles away at the time he was writing it gave him the necessary perspective and detachment and helped him see also all that violence and waste and futility and that terrible beauty that was born of it, all as manifest in our abiding faith in non-violence, religion and what one vaguely calls, idealism. For, Kanthapura is India in microcosm: what happened there is what happened everywhere in India during those terrible years of our fight for freedom.

The impact of Gandhi on our villages was an impact of a dynamic religion through one of its supreme practitioners on its later manifestations in our degrading caste-system; of idealism and a sense of purpose and urgency on a people who had virtually ceased to live, with resignation writ large on their faces. It was Gandhi's greatness that he produced hundreds and thousands of little Gandhis throughout the country. To be young *was* very heaven in those days. And Corner House Moorthy, *Our*

*Moorthy*, as the villagers called him, was young. *Moorthy* was in college when he felt the impact of Gandhi, and he walked out of it, a Gandhi man. There is nothing extraordinary in it, though, for in those days hundreds and thousands of young men throughout the country gave up their studies and courted arrest. But about the manner in which *Moorthy* walked out of college: He is said to have had, not an actual, first-hand experience of Gandhi by personal contact, but a 'vision' of Gandhi addressing a public meeting and *Moorthy* pushing his way through the crowd and joining the band of volunteers and receiving inspiration by a touch of Gandhi's hand. And that very evening *Moorthy* went out alone, and came back to College and walked out of it, for good. Now here is a perilous subject (even very gifted writers have on this question often given the impression of writing what the British or the American newspaper reading public wanted to read of Gandhi) for a young author—he was just past 25, himself deeply involved, to the extent of being obsessed, in Gandhism as well as in search for a Guru. Indeed the author's own self is projected, so largely projected in the character of *Moorthy*; and considering the circumstances and the temptations the identification of the young author with the young *Moorthy* appears to be inescapable, inevitable. Indeed, there is a good deal of idealization of the character he so much admires. Consider statements like: 'Moorthy had gone through life like a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent, brahminic, a very prince'; and later: 'He is our Gandhi'; 'He is the saint of our village'. From the time we meet him in the beginning of the novel to the very end of the book, *Moorthy* is perched at the top in his ascetic strength and does not seem to me to grow before our eyes very much: his capacity for action comes as a surprise in a visionary like *Moorthy*. When Rama in *The Serpent and the Rope* cries out in agony 'Sivoham, Sivoham' it doesn't sound sentimental because it comes at the end of a long exploration as something inevitable. But here when *Moorthy* says 'Sivoham' before he is half-way through his journey we feel slightly jolted, for it seems to have been imposed by the novelist on his yet unprepared character. And what saves the character, to the extent it is saved, is the novelist's integrity and awareness of the otherness of his character. For throughout the novel idealization is accompanied by constant disapprovals of 'this Gandhi business' and 'Gandhi vagabondage', the cynicism



of friends, and hostilities —veiled and open—from neighbours—all, making for constant vigilance against the dangers of the thesis novel.

A fellow university student, Dore, who will represent a section of sordid young men we always see around, thought it was not for 'a university fellow like him to play those grandma's tricks'. Even an ardent admirer like Rangamma liked him to change the sacred thread after his visit to the pariah quarters. Virago Venkamma of course would 'give him a fine welcome with broomstick'. She sneers at him: 'Ah the cat has taken to asceticism—only to commit more sins'. His mother was completely shaken, and implored to him: 'If your departed father was alive what would he think of you, my son, my son, my son'. The spectre of a son being excommunicated by the Swami continually haunts her and she curses Gandhi for it: 'Oh this Gandhi, would he were destroyed'. But the best corrective of all to the idealization of Moorthy's character comes from Moorthy himself. It is here that the novelist's integrity as man and as artist has asserted itself. It required remarkable courage and honesty to permit this idealised character to react the way he did in Pariah Rachanna's house. Here is Moorthy, a Gandhi man who has preached brotherhood and equality and castelessness and abolition of untouchability. He calls Pariah Rachanna 'Brother Rachanna' but will 'stand on the gutter slab' in front of Rachanna's house and talk to him 'from outside'. He now goes to see him. Rachanna is not at home. Rachanna's wife is pounding rice and encouraged apparently by Moorthy's professions and spectacularly liberal practices asks him in. It is a very trying moment for Moorthy—and for his creator; 'it is something new' and the novelist relates the distress felt by Moorthy with astonishing faithfulness to experience: 'and with one foot to the back and one foot to the fore, he stands trembling and undecided, and then suddenly hurries up the steps and crosses the threshold and squats on the earthen floor'. But Rachanna's wife 'quickly sweeps a corner, and spreads for him a wattle mat, but Moorthy, confused, blurts out, 'No, no, no, no' and he looks this side and that and thinks: surely, there is a carcass in the back yard and it's surely being skinned, and he smells the stench of hide and the stench of pickled pigs, and the roof seems to shake, and all the Gods and all the manes of heaven seem to cry out against him, and his hands steal mechanically to



the holy thread, and holding it he feels he would like to say, 'Hari-Om, Hari-Om'. But Rachanna's wife has come back with a little milk in a shining brass tumbler, and placing it on the floor with stretched hands, she says, 'Accept this from this poor hussy!' and slips back behind the corn-bins; and Moorthy says, 'I've just taken coffee, Lingamma . . .' but she interrupts him and says, 'Touch it, Moorthappa, touch it only as though it were offered to the gods, and we shall be sanctified; and Moorthy, with many a trembling prayer, touches the tumbler and brings it to his lips, and taking one sip, lays it aside'.

What saves the character is also Moorthy's passion for action. The character seems to slip out of the novelist's hands and go his own way, to fulfil his destiny. While his creator might be a man of thought his character must have felt that thought without action was abortive—a measure of the novelist's own supreme distinction as an artist. I think it is Sartre who said 'the bastard intellectual betrays action in the name of thought' and there is his own Indian tradition to back Moorthy—the man of thought in India has always been a man of disinterested action. Isn't that what Krishna meant when he said to Arjuna:

'Not farewell, but fare forward

O ye voyagers'

This, too, will help to feel the force of the text from the Gita quoted on the inner title page of the novel. And the entire novel bristles with action and all that action is centred round Moorthy. Earlier in this paper I spoke of the three strands of experience that go to make up the action of the novel—the religious, the social and the political and Moorthy represents to me the confluence of these three streams. For here is an educated man who has a true Brahmin's heightened awareness of his social and spiritual obligations and sets out to fulfil them and he is best equipped for his task thanks to the fertilising impact of these life-making influences. After all Moorthy received his inspiration from Gandhi to whom all action of all kinds had its grounding in religion. It is interesting to note that before there is ever any mention of Gandhi or Swaraj in the novel there is tremendous religious activity. Starting from an invocation to 'Kenchamma, goddess benign' to the end of the novel religion seems to sustain the spirits of the people of Kanthapura. The action begins with

the unearthing of a half-sunken lingam by Moorthy and its consecration. It is, by the way, symbolic of the growth of religion from the day the primitive man worshipped stock and stone and sang and danced round in ecstasy. The boys of Kanthapura had 'a grand feast' to celebrate the occasion. And one thing led to another. Soon they observed Sankara Jayanthi, Sankara Vijaya etc. etc.

It is important to remember that this became the nucleus of social regeneration in Kanthapura in the true tradition of India where social reformers have invariably been profoundly religious men. When Moorthy threw out a hint that 'Somebody will offer a dinner for each day of the month' there was spontaneous response from everyone and this is not *stated* by the novelist but comes home to us through the characters themselves: 'Let the first be mine', said Bhatta; 'the second mine' said Agent Nanjundiah; 'Third must be mine', insisted Pandit Venkateshiah. Note the verb 'insisted' which suggests (a) a willing co-operation in team-work and (b) the issue of social prestige in a small community—for the individual has no existence apart from the village—something like the ancient Greek City State where the city was the mother. This becomes clearer as the action proceeds for there is insistent disapproval of 'city boys' and 'city girls' and 'city ways' not directly by the novelist but by the main characters with whom he has sympathy. And he himself seems to stand aloof and watch the social changes and attitudes with amusement. To go back to the observation of *Jayanthi*. After Sankara Jayanthi it was the Rama festival, the Krishna festival and the Ganesha festival—the paradox of a festival-ridden poor country in which poverty has not crushed the spirit of man. 'When Moorthy asks for a rupee, no one will deny'. Everybody says 'Take it my son'. With the money thus collected they had Harikathas, camphor ceremonies, and readings from the epics and the puranas.

The Harikatha man is the village bard. And the bard must continually renew his sensibility if he has to play the role into which he is cast by himself and by society. He must, almost like the sophisticated poet of the 20th century, be at the conscious point of the race in his time—'race' and 'time' according as they have any meaning to him and his village—a point at which tradition and modern sensibility absorb each other and flow to foster society. The manner in which this village bard does it is rivalled



only by the novelist's success in capturing the very tone, cadence and diction, the irony and humour and the sublimity in a language which has never been put to such use before. While the humour of the situation is unmistakable in the mock-epic tone, not of the performer but of the novelist, the performer's absurdity of mixing legend and history arbitrarily with a daring disregard for chronology is no less interesting. But it can be overlooked in a village bard since we have been taught not to pay heed to fact and chronology in so great a poet as Shakespeare. And the entire passage is worth quoting to realise the nature of the achievement:

'In the great Heavens Brahma the Self-created One was lying on his serpent, when the sage Valmiki entered, announced by the two doorkeepers. "Oh, learned sire, what brings you into this distant world?" asked Brahma, and, offering the sage a seat beside him, fell at his feet. "Rise up, O God of Gods!" "I have come to bring you sinister news. Far down on the Earth you chose as your chief daughter Bharatha, the goddess of wisdom and well-being. You gave her the sage-loved Himalayas on the north and the seven surging seas to the south, and you gave her the Ganges to meditate on, the Godavary to live by, and the pure Cauvery to drink in. You gave her the riches of gold and of diamonds, and you gave her kings such as the world has never seen! Asoka, who loved his enemies and killed no animal; Chandragupta, who had the nine jewels of Wisdom at his court; and Dharmaraya and Vikramaditya and Akbar, and many a noble king. And you gave her, too, sages radiating wisdom to the eight cardinal points of the earth, Krishna and Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja. But, O Brahma! you who sent us the Prince propagators of the Holy Law and Sages that smote the darkness of Ignorance, you have forgotten us so long that men have come from across the seas and the oceans to trample on our wisdom and to spit on virtue itself. They have come to bind us and to whip us, to make our women die milkless and our men die ignorant. O Brahma! deign to send us one of your gods so that he may incarnate on Earth and bring back light and plenty to your enslaved daughter. . . ."—"O Sage" pronounced Brahma, "is it greater for you to ask or for me to say 'Yea'?" Siva himself will forthwith go and incarnate on the Earth and free my beloved daughter from her enforced slavery. Pray, seat yourself, and the messengers of Heaven shall fly to Kailas and Siva be informed of it.



And lo! when the Sage was still partaking of the pleasures Brahma offered him in hospitality, there was born in a family in Gujerat a son such as the world has never beheld. As soon as he came forth, the four wide walls began to shine like the Kingdom of the Sun, and hardly was he in the cradle than he began to lisp the language of wisdom. You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country. And as he grew up, and after he was duly shaven for the hair ceremony, he began to go out into the villages and assemble people and talk to them, and his voice was so pure, his forehead so brilliant with wisdom, that men followed him, more and more men followed him as they did Krishna the flute-player; and so he goes from village to village to slay the serpent of the foreign rule. Fight, says he, but harm no soul. Love all, says he, Hindu, Mahomedan, Christian or Pariah, for all are equal before God. Don't be attached to riches, says he, for riches create passions, and passions create attachment, and attachment hides the face of Truth. Truth must you tell, he says, for Truth is God, and verily, it is the only God I know. And he says too, spin every day. Spin and weave every day, for our Mother is in tattered weeds and a poor mother needs clothes to cover her sores. If you spin, he says, the money that goes to the Red-man will stay within your country and the Mother can feed the foodless and the milkless and the clothless. He is a saint, the Mahatma, a wise man and a soft man, and a saint. You know how he fasts and prays. And even his enemies fall at his feet. You know once there was an ignorant Pathan who thought the Mahatma was a covetous man and wanted to kill him. He had a sword beneath his shirt as he stood waiting in the dark for the Mahatma to come out of a lecture-hall. The Mahatma comes and the man lifts up his sword. But the Mahatma puts his hands on the wicked man's shoulders and says, 'Brother, what do you want of me?' And the man falls at the feet of the Mahatma and kisses them, and from that day onwards there was never a soul more devoted than he. And the serpent that crossed the thighs of the Mahatma, a huge serpent too. . . . The blank probably indicates the author's own reservation and detachment in respect of the incredible stories that have been woven round the name of the Mahatma. Didn't Nehru say, where he (Gandhi) sat

became a temple, where he walked the ground became hallowed?

But the most interesting point about the village bard's performance and the dexterity with which the novelist captures it to suit his purpose is that the whole of the Indian tradition brought up to date along with its pertinent implications for the present flows, into the villagers because it is rendered in the villager's own idiom. And yet here or anywhere else is Gandhi himself not directly introduced as a character in the novel which would have only made for melodrama and sentimentality as I am afraid it does in another Indian novel in English where Gandhi does often look like a Cheap-Jack. Gandhi and his work is here by report, more in dream and vision than in fact, but he comes to life in the manner in which his impact is felt, realised and revitalised by the novelist.

As to Moorthy, so also to the national movement there is considerable resistance from the conservative, the ignorant and those with vested interests and for the novelist to ignore these would have made the picture biased and incomplete. Is it spinning the yarn? But 'Brahmins do not spin, do they? (Besides) We have weavers in the village'. As for the Sudras and Pariahs one will say 'What will it give us?' The second one is going to have a child; and another excuses herself by saying 'I am going for my brother's marriage'. But Moorthy is a tough nut and an earnest though imaginative reformer. He explains the economic implications of his measure in the most intimately personal terms and he varies the bait from person to person, quite shrewdly. To one set of women he says 'she cannot buy the peacock blue sari for her daughter Lakshmi—and Lakshmi is to be married'. Another is lured to spin and save money to spend on a granddaughter's marriage or a pregnant second daughter's seventh-month ceremony. So on and so forth.

Men are more resistant but Moorthy will not take a defeat. He goes to Patel Range Gowda and enlists his sympathy and active support for the cause. Range Gowda speaks with the voice of authority and speaks with a forthrightness that no self-respecting man can withhold his co-operation. He says 'If you are the sons of your father, do what this learned boy says'. And Range Gowda himself proposes Moorthy for the Presidentship of the Village Panchayat. Some one else proposes Range Gowda for the Vice-



Presidentship. 'A Rama must have a Hanuman' and so Seenu is another member; there must be Rachanna apparently because he is a Harijan; and Rangamma because they would like to have a woman representative. Here is the germ, literally a germ—a germ which has caused a virulent epidemic—of not merely All-India Congress Committees but also the precedent, a dangerous precedent, for all future committees and cabinets in the Centre and in the States. There is of course no such comment by the novelist but no one can miss its ominous implications and reverberations.

Now Moorthy must enthuse the women too and organise them. And he does. They start talking about Rani Lakshmi Bai, Kamala Devi, Sarojini and Annie Besant and they feel challenged by the high standards set by them. Such is the way Moorthy sensitizes them to their social obligations, obligations outside their own families that they say: 'and *we* think of nothing but the blowpipe and the broomstick and the milking of the many cows'. They now decide to organize a Volunteer Corps. The context is far too rich in ironic possibilities for even the most serious artist to throw away and Raja Rao knows the woman's mind and heart, her vanities, her rejoicings and her sufferings as not even the best women writers know. And now these members of the *Sevika Sangha* propose to organize a Volunteer Corps—what for? to go and meet Moorthy like they do in the city: They all said 'That will be beautiful'. And each one said 'I shall wear the Dharmawar sari and the diamond hair flower'—'And I shall wear the sari I wore at Nanjamma's daughter's marriage, that everybody liked so much and I shall wear the gold belt too. And those who were widows said (here is the Charles Lamb kind of blending of humour and pathos): 'Well, I shall wear only the gold belt and the necklace, now that I cannot wear the bangles', and Ratna (poor thing, she had set her heart on Moorthy and had prayed for him) said 'I shall part my hair to the left, and wear just a tiny kunkum mark and wear the sari till it reaches the toes and it will float and flutter so well'. As if the details won't do the novelist sums it up for his readers: 'That is how they became volunteers'. And they were called *Sevis*. *Sevis* indeed! But the novelist's irony cuts both ways. For everytime the milk curdled or a *dhoti* was not dry, the men folk would say, 'And this is all because of this sevi business'.



Both the religious bhajans and the national movement have helped the novelist penetrate into the deeper layers of human nature and perceive the pettiness, greed, jealousy and in some cases callousness and inhumanity of the so-called spiritually-bent Indian. One hadn't thought until one read this novel that a village could offer such opportunities for observing human nature in all its rich diversity. Speaking for myself, if I must 'go back to the village', I suppose I shall do so as much to save ourselves from the mechanization of the soul as to save Fiction itself from the brink of exhaustion having been fed to satiety on standardized societies. The village which has nurtured a Moorthy, a Seenu and Advocate Sankar, (a character so full of scope for the novelist's exercise of irony, humour and a more than ordinary earnestness) and Rangamma and Ratna has also sheltered Virago Venkamma and Bhatta and his friend Advocate Seenappa. Venkamma is an ignorant woman and indulges in scandals against Moorthy and Ratna and Rangamma, born partly at least of a frustration for not winning over Moorthy for a son-in-law. And Bhatta seems to walk out of the novelist's pages into the larger world (from where no doubt he has come into them) with his 'oily calendar' and 'learned calculations on his agile fingers'. He is one of the most interesting men in Kanthapura. He 'began life with a loin cloth at his waist, and a copper pot in his hand' went on adding 'several acres of the peasants' lands to his 'own domain'. Today Bhatta means money and money means Bhatta and he charges 10 per cent interest and thanks to Moorthy and his immense popularity with the villagers he has gone upto 20 per cent interest even. The novelist who has a higher conception of the avocation of the Brahmin, the type of whom he sees in men like Ramakrishnayya of the older generation, and Moorthy, of the coming generation, now witnesses his degradation in Bhatta—and yet he is the 'First Brahmin of Kanthapura'. For with increasing prosperity Bhatta lost interest in his priesthood—a fine example of T. S. Eliot's 'cultural elite' wanting to be the 'governing elite'. 'It was so difficult to get him for an obsequial dinner or a marriage ceremony'. The Brahmin who started with ascetic ways which he kept up for show assiduously laboured to acquire wealth and position and luxury and lived on exploitation of his neighbours, while he should have been promoting their interests.

It looks as if the character agitates the novelist's mind con-

siderably. (I reliably learn this portrayal of Bhatta, which must have hurt the susceptibilities of certain vested interests was a contributory factor in their efforts to have the novel withdrawn from the list of prescribed textbooks in this part of the country—which is rather unfortunate considering that the creator of Bhatta has also given shape and substance to Moorthy who can redeem a hundred Bhattas. The others are the alleged obscenity of the coffee-planter's behaviour towards working women, and the language of the police constable—both of them rather crude men but whose crudity is no more than hinted at, in passing. A third reason is the Indian English by which the Indian teacher of English must have felt outraged. And as though he knew no other English novel he demanded the substitution of *Pride and Prejudice*, the very acme of 'Chaste English' for the colonial Indian who made the Englishman's standards his own [more royal than the King] regardless of his appreciation of the society portrayed by Jane Austen or the overtones and undertones of the language in which the portrayal is done. But *Kanthapura* itself helped combat the colonial complex and win respect for the Indian—Indian in theme and treatment no less than in the marvellously creative use of English for the expression of a truly Indian sensibility). And he goes on to say 'Bhatta is very learned in his art. It would be all over within the twinkling of an eye. Then the real obsequial dinner begins with fresh honey and solid curds and Bhatta's beloved Bengal-gram khir'. The children are playing and the older people are waiting until 'the holy Brahmins finish their meal'. But the holy Brahmin—does he eat to live? No: 'But Bhatta goes on munching and belching, drinking water and then munching again—Rama-Rama, Rama-Rama'. Now comes the crushing blow: 'One does not have an obsequial dinner every day.'

Bhatta is an unworthy husband too, what with his lack of consideration for his wife at home. On the days he dines out his poor wife has only dal-soup and rice. When the master of the house is out, better not bother about the meal: 'On the nights of obsequial dinner *he* eats so little' and she doesn't think of a dinner for herself and Bhatta has no thought of her. His wife dies and soon this middle aged pot-bellied priest marries a girl of twelve and half years old. What could he do? 'Offers of marriage came from here and there'. There is dowry too: 'A thousand



rupees cash, and five acres of wet land. And a real seven days' marriage. And horoscopes agree marvellously—they are meant to what with all the twistings and distortions and maneuvers of the learned priest. It is this same Bhatta who negotiates Advocate Seenappa's second marriage—a widower like Bhatta, with two teeth lost, marrying a girl in her early teens.

Bhatta's other social considerations hardly go farther. As for them, the less said the better: 'Bhatta was the only one who would have nothing to do with these Gandhi bhajans'. He wouldn't have the city troubles in Kanthapura, no 'annoyances'. Besides, his business contracts he owed to Government patronage. He was also the Election agent and got 'two thousand for it'. But Bhatta was no unredeemed monster. 'Clever fellow this Bhatta'—the remark made earlier in the novel has its overtones of indignation on the part of the author. And a kind of indignation continues in our attitude towards him. But he has his good side too. The transition in the character is worked out by means of a half-sarcastic, half-sympathetic observation, 'Bhatta was a fine fellow for all that'. But there is no sudden conversion. For when Moorthy's mother Narasamma dies Rangamma offers to have the obsequial ceremonies in her house because Moorthy is alone. But the First Brahmin of the village will not associate himself for all the world: 'you can offer me a king's daughter but never will I sell my soul to a pariah'. He even actively works against Moorthy by ganging up with Venkamma and the police man Bade Khan, (vested interests have always cut across the social barriers of caste and sex even as they have flourished on them), hastens the death of Narasamma by setting afloat rumours of excommunication. He goes to Kashi all right to work out his sins and earn salvation. But that is not the moment sympathy flows from us towards Bhatta. It happens earlier and to recall it is to soften a little towards him. This money-lender had his moments of magnanimity too. Hadn't he sent our Fig-tree House Ramu to the city for studies? Why should he have done that? He said, 'If you will bring a name to Kanthapura—that is my only recompense. And if by Kenchamma's grace you get rich and become a Collector, you will think of this poor Bhatta and send him the money—with no interest, of course my son, for I have given it in the name of God. If not, may the gods keep you safe and fit...'



The narrator's own comment, coming immediately after Bhatta's helps to place the character in correct perspective: 'I tell you, he was not a bad man, was Bhatta'.

It remains a fact, though, that Bhatta alienated himself generally from the sympathies of the rest of the village but that he also alienated himself from himself is shown from the way he disappeared from Kanthapura into Banaras. The novelist's implication is fairly clear: while the others participated in the mainstream of life—or was it death? but was it needless death after all?—and could have the satisfaction of having preserved themselves from 'inner shame', Bhatta and Venkamma had no claim to any sense of fulfilment. But is there any fulfilment at all in the novel? Thanks to police atrocities the entire village is desolate: 'corner house was all but fallen; Rangamma's house was tileless; Nanjamma's house doorless and roofless' and in a word 'there was neither man nor mosquito in Kanthapura', their men had been arrested and imprisoned, women scattered among neighbouring villages, and Moorthy gone away, God knows where. Chinna, the concubine 'continued to make her living by lifting her leg'. Have the poor people suffered and sacrificed all this for nothing? Or for their faith in a young misguided zealot?—who is not there anymore to guide or misguide them. It is interesting that only Range Gowda of all should go back to Kanthapura after his period of imprisonment. But he is a broken man, 'lean as an arecanut tree', no longer the Tiger that he was. Is that the lot of the peasant?, one will ask at the end of the novel. For the 'city boys', have gone to the city, only the peasant who has nowhere else to go, goes back to his soil—and stays alone, literally the only one left to tell the tale of the emptied village. What will anyone tell? 'My heart, it beat like a drum' is the last sentence of the novel.

It is a breathless tale from the beginning to the end and fascinatingly told. But the telling is not easy as the author himself confesses in his preface, which, by the way, is a classic of its kind. What is it that makes the telling difficult, then? It is, one would suppose, the number of things he packs into the tale—has literally loaded every rift with ore. Into the calm valley of Himavathy there comes not merely Congress politics, but there is an exodus of population—poor and half-starved people from below the Ghats, from Andhra and from Tamilnad, armies of

coolies marched past to work in the Skeffington Estate owned by the Red-man. And the marching of these coolies reminds one of those calculatedly interminable sentences of a Gibbon or a Macaulay or a De Quincey, and described not with pomp and circumstance but in a heart-rending tone; 'half-naked, starving, spitting, weeping, vomiting, coughing, shivering, squeaking, shouting, moaning coolies with the children clung to their mothers' breasts, the old men to their sons' arms, and bundles hung over shoulder and arm . . . . . winding through the twists of the Estate path'. And their joy and excitement on finding employment—'a four anna bit for a man hand' and a 'two anna bit for a woman hand'—and on finding rice and water they cringed before the Sahib and fell on his feet in gratitude and that night they 'slept the sleep of princes'. A considerable part of the book is taken up with life on the coffee estate, the crudities and vulgarities of the Red-man; the humiliations the poor and the helpless accept (Bade Khan, the police man, 'has just to sneeze or cough and everybody will say 'I lick your feet'); the sickness that broke them and the violation of their women's honour—all have been portrayed most vividly and convincingly to the last detail of credibility.

Life on the Red-man's estate with its brutalities and humiliations is, speaking in a limited way, like the sub-plot of a tragedy. It is part of the general tragedy depicted in the rest of the book—with this difference, though, that while there, suffering brought the victims a chastening, ennobling feeling now and then and left them with perhaps a distant hope, if any, suffering on the estate was soul-destroying and absolutely devoid of compensations. That may be some comfort to those proud men who perished in their youth.

For one thing, the people of Kanthapura for the first time felt one with the rest of the country as politically their Village Panchayat was affiliated to the All-India Congress. And thanks to the national awakening, slowly this little village swam into the orbit of world consciousness too, in its own way.

The 'story' is no doubt a very important aspect of the novel. But the novel today has advanced so much that it is claimed to be the one bright book of life and therefore one of the potent means of education of the sensibility of the young. So viewed, the story is only a story—the story is a story is a story. As I said earlier this is a breathless story or, stories illustrating a story, in



the age-old Indian tradition of story-telling. But what strikes one here is that for the first time in modern times in India the novel in Raja Rao's hands has become a mature means of enlarging the frontiers of human consciousness, even intellectually speaking—while its supreme manifestations can only be seen in *The Serpent and the Rope* with the intellectual hero operating on the highest possible plane, in *Kanthapura*, the hero while he is not an intellectual is nevertheless a sort of university man and what he lacks by way of cerebration he makes up by his almost uncompromising idealism and faith in traditional ways of living. It is interesting that global consciousness should come to Kanthapura through 'the blue paper' and 'the white paper', of course, with the novelist's shattering irony. For Rangamma's sources of this global consciousness are the *Tainadu*, *Viswakarnataka*, *Deshabandhu* and *Jayabharatha*, all of them snobbishly dismissed by big people during the period in question as three pice rags. Anything else would not harmonise with the tone and tenor of the novel—it works at the village level and any knowledge and wisdom that come to it or go out of it can only be at that level. Besides, it is a tale told by a grandmother from her rich repertoire. It is precisely because of this narrow framework within which it must operate that the art of this novelist is rendered the most difficult when called upon to assimilate seemingly impossible things into a simple sensibility. But consider how what must be to the average people of Kanthapura nothing short of encyclopaedic knowledge flows through village channels to Rangamma and through her to the others: The radio becomes 'the speech that goes across the air'. Jagadish Chandra Bose's discovery gets expressed as 'the plants that weep'; and Darwin's theory of Evolution as 'the monkeys that were the men we have become'; of the 17th century French scientist's germ theory as 'worms thin-as-dust that get into your blood and give you dysentery and plague and cholera'. Sir James Jeans's 'Mysterious Universe' comes to Rangamma with an equally disarming irreducible minimum of simplicity though not without a touch of irony as 'the stars that are so far, that some have poured their light into the blue space long before you were born, long before you were born, or your father was born or your grandfather was born'.

A purely scientific sensibility is absorbed into a unified sensibility and the dichotomy of Sir C. P. Snow's *two* cultures



disappears with only different degrees of *one* cultural consciousness resulting from such an absorption. Science and religion, history and myth meet with effortless ease and merge in one another as in the following gossipy extract:

‘... just as a day of Brahma is a million million years of ours, the day of the stars is a million million times our day, and each star has a sun and each sun has a moon, and each moon has an earth, and some there are that have two moons, and some three, and out there between the folds of the milky way, she told us (the ‘she told us’ in parenthesis brings you down with a thud from the cosmic heights to a consciousness of this world, this earth and this village of Kanthapura with its four and twenty houses); out there, (which is the telescope) there is just a chink and you put your eyes to a great tube and see another world ‘with sun and moon and stars, all bright and floating in the diamond dust of God’.

All the same the villagers of Kanthapura have not lost their sense of wonder, of the enchantment of nature and an intuitive wisdom to perceive natural phenomenon in terms of man’s place in the scheme of things:

‘Suddenly a shooting star sweeps across the sky between the house-roof and the byre-roof’; and Ramakrishnayya says ‘Some good soul has left the earth’.

So close does the villager live to Nature that his imagination has never viewed nature as insensate, inanimate but with an ever-increasing sense of joy and the wonder of creation:

‘Sometimes people say to themselves, the Goddess of the River plays through the night with the Goddess of the Hill. Kenchamma is the mother of Himavathy. May the Goddess bless us’. Is it too much to believe then that they threw a ‘last glance at the god’ and went to sleep with ‘the god’s face framed within our eyes’? It is surprisingly the same attitude that makes them admonish the wind or the rain (in whom they have put their faith for their very existence) when it lets them down: ‘The prostitute of a wind, she is showing her tricks again’. Such is the intimacy between man and God, between man and Nature.

Here is a distinctive Indian sensibility, a peasant sensibility to be precise and expressed in the English language. The words are English but the organization is Indian and the novelist had to organize it himself. There was no ready-made expression for him.

Mr E. M. Forster reviewing Tagore's *Home and the World* had said as early as in 1919: 'In literature as in science they (Indians) must work over the results of the West on the chance of their proving of use and one expects that the younger writers will reject the experiment of *The Home and the World*, and will adopt some freer form'. It was just as well that Raja Rao had to do so. It helped him escape from the clichés and the elaborate prose style of the novel that had come down to us from the Victorian novelists. The very purity of that English became a disability to the Indian writer of fiction. Viewed in that light it was most fortunate, it appears to me, that Mr Raja Rao went to France rather than England. Neither a dilapidated Scott nor that prim spinster Jane Austen would have been of any real help to a young Indian with Raja Rao's kind of preoccupations. Dickens couldn't have helped him—he was far too serious to be an entertainer in fiction. Thomas Hardy who was the rage in India at the time Raja Rao started writing might have been a fatal influence on a Hindu writer though from what one knows of Raja Rao from the three novels he has written to date that his concerns were such that he might have reacted against Hardy's fatalistic preoccupations. Only the American, or the European (French or Russian) novel could have offered him any stimulus.

I am not sure because I do not know French literature, that any particular French novelist has had any *decisive* influence on him and it may only be a coincidence that we Indians speak fast and speak with emotion and intensity like the French; and the English understatement unless one employed the ironic attitude of R. K. Narayan could not have been adequate for the expression of an essentially Indian sensibility. And so contact with the French language must have shown him how to forge ahead—use the English language with its essential understatement of which he must have had a fair mastery when he first went abroad, with the French kind of intensity and precision. Fortunately the Sanskrit tradition and the work of the Vachanākaras in modern Kannada literature were both accessible to him, indeed they must have shaped his sensibility so much that given a theme like that of *Kanthapura* the expression could only have been an extension of the Indian mode to the service of an Indian sensibility. If I may elaborate it a little, the emotional upheaval that overtook *Kanthapura* could only find expression by breaking the formal



English syntax to suit the sudden changes of mood and sharp contrasts in tone, by establishing a correspondence between perceptions and the images he could readily lay his hands on in the life around and by a fresh emphasis on old images and a completely different, in this case Kannada, intonation to English sentences. In other words it had to be a highly original style, a technical innovation indistinguishable from an essential Indian sensibility. Consider the wide range of feelings and attitudes from the behaviour of an Indian crowd, not today but thirty years ago, with the police atrocities on the Gandhi-crowds:

‘While policemen beat the crowd this side and that side and groans and moans and cries and shouts and coughs and oaths and bangs and kicks are heard while there is heard ‘Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai, M . . . ki . . . Jai.’ The massing of words corresponds to the massing of men in a crowd and the massing of upsurging emotions in response to police treatment.

But a temple atmosphere is different, though there will also be a flow of men to and from the temple:

‘People came and people went; they banged the bell and touched the bull and took the flowers’.

Is it a devotional prayerful approach to the goddess? Well, it sounds like a prayer in our own languages, so intimately personal and fervent:

‘O Kenchamma! Protect us always like this through famine and disease death and despair. O most high and bounteous! We shall offer you our first rice and our first fruit and we shall offer you saris and boddice cloth. . . .’ This has close affinities with poetry, indeed sounds like the chanting of hymns, approximating to mantric poetry.

And what a far cry from this to the lingo of the cartman: ‘hè ho’, cries the cartman and the bulls shiver and start.’ Or the vigorous, musical counting of measures of rice or ragi in the villages:

‘One, two, three, Hm—Four Hm, Five, and the superstition which forbids the mention of six (in some parts of the country “seven”) and so six becomes “God’s extra”, “Hm”.’

Now the more intimately used language of the dining hall: ‘Take only this much milk, aunt, just this much.’



'Take it Bhattre, only one cup more, just one'. Just consider what the English equivalent would have meant for a people like us who need coaxing: 'Won't you have a second helping?' would not merely be annoying but ineffective.

One step down and the whining, cringing peasant or pariah woman who comes to Bhatta for a loan:

'Learned Maharaja, anything you deem fit'. To an innocent English or American reader, 'learned' and 'Maharaja' would be quite baffling like the simple 'Learned One has come, The Learned one', indicating only the socially or officially superior one.

Sometimes a question hardly elicits any corresponding response: 'How are you?' 'Thank you' would make no sense and to employ it in conversation is to strike a false note. Here in the novel the question brings out, 'Like this, you see'—so much remains unsaid in older societies and one has to view it in that light.

Similarly it would be absurd for a poor peasant to be known by his initials but names become descriptive:

The bent-legged Chandrayya; waterfall Venkamma, Front House people, Fig House people; nine-beamed house Range Gowda etc., etc.

It would be most disrespectful to call the First Brahmin anything but 'Bhattre' or Moorthy anything but Moorthappa, especially when there is a difference in social or official status. But the status which birth, wealth and society confer on Bhatta don't stand him in good stead spiritually. And here is the homely equivalent of 'Not all the perfumes of Arabia can sweeten this little hand': 'the sinner may go to the ocean but the water will only touch his knees', but it bespeaks a distinct Indian sensibility—water as a time-honoured symbol of purification and the vivid image of the insufficiency of an ocean of water to wash this man's sins away, both the symbol and the image conveying an immediate apprehension of all they stand for to the illiterate villager. Consider again the equivalent of 'One swallow does not make a summer': 'A cock does not make a morning nor a single man a revolution', where the first half with its homely familiarity helps illumine a new formulation, alien to the Indian ethos but thanks to the juxtaposition of the familiarly Indian, the new and the different are at once absorbed into our own consciousness as into our linguistic patterns, thus extending the frontiers of both.

Where the sensibility is different, the expression unless also different from English-English, the experience itself does not come through. Where the Englishman says 'nip it in the bud', Raja Rao, perhaps because of its aesthetically offensive imagery in the Indian context, has recourse to the Indian idiom 'crush it in the seed' which will not fail to have its startling effect in an agricultural community. Lastly, a word about his plastic use of English language to describe the ever-enlarging spheres of our relationships, for example, 'He is my wife's elder brother's wife's brother-in-law', both because the word cousin doesn't convey the precise nature of the relationship and because our relationships do not stop with cousins or brothers- and sisters-in-law. But expressed in English it helps one see the humour implicit in the change slowly coming over Indian society of dwindling social responsibility. The vagueness of these extended relationships is offset by the terms of endearment used to qualify the near one, as in 'our Seetharamu, our Maddur Seetharamu'—in both cases, a literal translation of the Indian idiom.

A whole character comes to life in one phrase: 'Ironshop Inam Khan gun in hand and fire in his eyes'; and a whole social milieu gets summed up in 'kitchen queen' for the Indian woman. Even the huge locomotive is seen as a living, kicking giant: 'the train sneezed and wheezed and snorted and moved on.'

When it comes to style the breath-taking long sentences, page-long sentences, repetitions of names and words, while sometimes necessary to build up the tempo of the commotion in Kanthapura can also sound highly mannered and they do. But the author is not impoverished of stylistic devices to suit a wide range of emotional or mental states. In fact the one outstanding contribution of Mr Raja Rao to Indian writing in English is to have struck new paths for a sensibility which is essentially Indian. While R. K. Narayan has invented a language which suits his purpose most adequately it is not likely to be of much help except in minor ways to those that write fiction in English after him unless they bring to fiction-writing gifts like his. Indian Fiction in English can, it seems to me, make headway by continuing the Raja Rao line, which is to say one must have not merely his technique, but his amazingly high intellectual equipment and awareness of the Indian tradition—all of which should be possible to acquire



in varying degrees by serious aspirants—Shantha Rama Rau is already in his line and has achieved considerable distinction in the novel form.

But these one witnesses at their best in *The Serpent and the Rope* and in a different way in his latest, *The Cat and Shakespeare*. But *Kanthapura* has shown full promise of the later possibilities and considerable achievement too in comparison with them. That I was not introduced to it twenty-five years ago while in University as a student and that our universities and literary critics shouldn't have created the atmosphere which could have won respectful attention to a work like that and that I should have waited for *The Serpent and the Rope* via which I had to approach it is one of my chief regrets. But that the reader of *The Serpent and the Rope*, a major work of fiction in the English language by any standards, should realise as I do that far from taking away from the distinct merit of the author's first novel, *SR* only makes him go back to it for its technical innovation and the amazing maturity of its author of hardly 26 or so makes it a minor classic. And it is as a minor classic that one hopes it will endure.

The question of its endurance makes one salute gratefully Messrs Allen and Unwin, publishers of no small standing, for the courage and the vision and, considering the Indian political context then and the nature of the theme Raja Rao has treated, the disinterestedness and magnanimity that have weighed with the publishers in looking upon a work of art as art (the deep called to the deep) and not as a political document or something else. I am not sure that Raja Rao could have then found a publisher in India for his 'Indian English'. All the better then that he was so fortunate as to find British publishers of repute for his first work which launched a youngman of 26 on his creative career, a career the full implications of which became evident with the publication of *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare* the themes of both of which are unmistakably anticipated in *Kanthapura* in the novelist's pre-occupations with religion, tradition, the intellectual hero, and the exploration of spiritual depths by means of symbols. Add to these, an admirable contemporary sensibility which assimilates disparate experiences of diverse lands and cultures, and experimentation with the English language to make it adequate for the expression of an essentially Indian sensibility.



## D. H. LAWRENCE AND THE INDIAN SENSIBILITY

P. RAMA MOORTHY

THERE is a certain sadness in old cultures. This sadness, it would seem, is an outcome of a certain immobilisation of the deeper levels of consciousness. The old cultures have time-honoured patterns for life and the individual consciousness has only to wake into the groove and function in the orbit. The more ancient the culture the wider the range of patterns and lesser the freedom. Past juts into the present, custom supplants the initiative and tradition stifles the creative urge. In result, life becomes a habit, and repetition its fulfilment.

Perhaps in no other country has life been so completely formalised as in India. Through centuries it has cultivated its postures and time has only hardened the walls. The outward caste and the inward ritual have systematically sought to edge life out. 'There is a ritual for bathing, there is a ritual for taking food, there is a ritual for love, for procreation. There are rituals to be performed at sunrise, midday, sunset and all the crucial points in the cycle of seasons and years. There is ritual for breathing, ritual for each change of status, ritual for all important events of life.'

The morbid fear of life drives man to the neurotic comfort of habit. The plough remains unchanged through the centuries as much as the code of Manu. The culture remains a marvel of preservation, of habit against life.

This morbid concern for preservation and security has resulted in either the complete paralysis or the systematic thwarting of the deeper centres of consciousness. Life has been lived on the surface in the lukewarm comfort of routine. Action loses its edge, and limbs withdraw. Siva, the god of meditation and sleep, whose temples outnumber the temples of any other god, becomes the symbol.

It was Lawrence that remarked on seeing the seated image of Buddha, 'I wish he get up'. Yet, ironically, Buddha was just about the only revolutionary in the land who did 'get up'

from the locked-up posture, against Tradition, against God, and did affect the people for however brief a time. But God and Tradition were so compulsive to the people of the land that Buddha had meaning only as God and his teaching a place only as Tradition. So the wandering Master was immobilised into the traditional posture of meditation and consigned to the mounting pile of the gods. And when memory wore out the aura dimmed and Buddha was exiled and abandoned to the past.

For Buddha did the outrage of shifting the centre from God to the Individual, from Tradition to the Moment—which is essentially what Lawrence does in literature. He derives his religion from the Blood, his faith from the Moment. Man is the complex of sentience where in the ceaseless weave of life 'God' is eternally born:

The history of the cosmos  
is the history of the struggle of becoming.  
When the dim flux of unformed life  
struggled, convulsed back and forth upon itself,  
and broke at last into light and dark  
came into existence as light  
came into existence as cold shadow  
then every atom of the cosmos trembled with delight.  
Behold, God is born!  
He is bright light!  
He is pitch dark and cold!

Life, as Lawrence understood, is for ever a process of becoming and a sense of arrival is a negation of it. Tradition seeks to capture it in the net of time and ends by forfeiting what it seeks to possess. No other writer had a clearer perception of the pernicious nature of tradition than Lawrence. He denounced it in his novels, poems, essays and letters: he felt that shedding the past, the tradition, was part of the creative process. He hoped for the world of the adult man and the adult woman, of full and free individuals, not in the fen of old civilisations, but in the virgin lands unsullied by the past: America, for example, was his hope, and he placed his Rananim—'the isle of the Blest'—in Florida. He warned the youngest and the least ravaged of the nations against the insidious encroachment of tradition and urged her

to trust her blood and to forge ahead on her own. In his essay 'America, listen to your own', he declared:

Happy is the nation which hasn't got a tradition and which lacks cultural monuments. How gay Greece must have been, while Egypt was sneering at her for an uneducated young nobody, and what a good time Rome was having, while Hellas was looking down a cultured and supercilious nose at her. There's as fine fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

The self-congratulation of Europe and the old culture was a process of unconscious self-deception, an imperceptible contracting out of life.

The old countries have a past, to be faithful to.  
America still has only an unrevealed future.

And it is much more difficult and delicate to be  
true to an unborn future than to an  
accomplished past.

Tradition, tradition, tradition, it is easy enough  
to be faithful to a tradition,

But to be faithful to something that has not yet  
come to pass, that does not yet exist,  
save as a subtle, struggling germ in  
individual hearts,

Not a mob thing, nor a mass thing, nor a class thing,  
nor a hundred-per-cent thing

But a subtle, struggling little germ, struggling  
half-realised in individual hearts, and  
nowhere else,

That is a difficult thing to be faithful to.

The work of Lawrence is the most vivid expression of this 'subtle, struggling little' germ, struggling half-realised in individual hearts'. It springs from the 'well-head' of the Moment—'We are the mystic NOW'—and are the poetic realisations of the Buddhistic momentaneity.

What is life? It was gall and wormwood in the morning.  
Now it is a cup of tea. Pass the sugar.



It was the distinction of Lawrence that he accepted Life on its own terms and dignified it in all its completeness. He had too holy a sense of life to suffer it to subserve an imported purpose, be it the justification of the ways of God to Man or the ways of society to man. It was in this most vigorous, realistic sense that life to Lawrence was religion lived in the fulness of its range and complexity. It was a strange 'inhuman', 'un-spiritual' religion, a religion that was a 'bath of blood'—the blood that was the living plasm of creation. It was, in a stranger way, a throbbing state of the 'other' which was only a genuine basis of relationship—a relationship divested of a sense of social or religious hierarchy. It was a moment of union, a beyond out of individuation, a 'continuous breaking' of buds'. It was, at its most vigorous, a relationship of neither 'pity' nor 'sympathy' but a flying communion of non-human elemental nature. St Mawr, the horse, for instance, meets Lou in a much more vital way than the civilisation ever did, the Ricos, the priests and the neighbours being completely out of the marvel of life—the horse giving her what no man could ever give, a rarer and a purer ignition of contact, which finally takes the woman and the horse out of the stifling environs of the civilisation. The snake in the well known poem, like the horse, establishes a fleeting moment of communion beyond 'pity' or 'sympathy' or Christian 'charity', a communion in which the resilient marvel of creation is saluted as one of the 'lords of life', 'uncrowned in the underworld, Now due to be crowned again'. It is love of life, the living beings, a quick spontaneous tear of affection for the bird and the beast—not the St Francis way of calling a donkey brother and blessing the birds on the insured relationship of religious charity, but more in the manner of the Ancient Mariner who watched the water-snakes, their 'flash of golden fire' and 'blessed them unaware'.

This sense of love which is unobliged to religion or traditions, this aesthetic warmth and lambency of affection is rather a strain on a traditional religious sensibility. It comprehends the result, but not the process which is the secret of both religion and art. To an Indian sensibility which is shaped in an atmosphere of non-violence where animals are not killed for food, where even pests are indulged, cows and birds are worshipped, Lawrence comes as compassion to confirm their religious conviction. While in the traditional lore man and animal relationship

is based on a principle of religious give and take, where the giver is always the man the receiver the animal, man the pitier and the animal the pitied, in Lawrence it operates on a level so distinct as to be different. The snake, for instance, gives to him infinitely more than he could give, indeed it vouchsafes a vision without which he would be so much poorer, and the relationship, despite the pettiness of him that caused him to throw a log at him, is one of a strange mystical equality, a state where the social hierarchical values are utterly irrelevant. It is 'empathy' without any sense of agency, a sense of sharing of an unknown common source, almost like Keats's relationship with the sparrow: 'When I see a sparrow at the door I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel'.

The Indian, unlike the Christian, invests the animals with souls but only of an inferior kind. The human life is the most precious in that it is the last in the cycle of births and nearest to liberation, and even gods, to quote Vivekananda, have to come down in human form to attain salvation. Man, the undisputed lord of creation, is in a unique position to dispense pity and kindness to lesser species. He has a *duty* to them, he must shelter and protect them, even as *Sibi* at the cost of self-sacrifice. He is compassion, for nature is passive and tender: the deer drinks from the hand of Sakuntala and the plants grow at her touch.

At the other extreme, nature is terror which is annihilation, though annihilation is mysteriously bound up with liberation. The dance of Nataraja is annihilation for the sake of creation. The *Viswarupa* terrifies in its illumination. But nature, here, does not seem to rise to meet man on its own terms. The rose 'that is a running flame', the snake that is a 'lightning', the horse (St Mawr) that 'burns with life' are romantic conceits, not lived realities. To Lawrence, nature, of which man and woman are the most vivid expressions, is a vast stream of 'energy', the eternal life-stuff. From a flower to a man everything is individuated, 'unique and non-pareil'. The individuation is the ultimate value and it is sacred and inviolable. Man and nature meet in a state of aesthetic 'otherness' where even death in the process can be a benediction as the Woman Who Rode Away is licked into a strange fire of relationship at the quickening touch of the primitive hands and finally ceases upon the ecstasy. The meeting is on the individual 'quick', the quick being the beyond

man and nature, the other where life and death do not matter, for what matters is the vivid moment of realisation, the flash of the vision. It is too daring a conception with which only the primitive consciousness is in communion for there it manifests itself in the ritual sacrifice, not uncommon to an Indian sensibility either, for at the raw primitive level animal sacrifice, including the human, is a central part of the primitive religion, of the *Shakti* cult, and at the intellectual level death becomes the necessary condition for illumination as in the dance of Nataraja, though it is more a conceptual reality than an experiential one.

From nature to woman is but a logical step. Woman is nature personified, the *Prakriti*, the primary matter, the other principle of creation. She is mother, and also wife.\* As mother she is love and peace, as wife she is sex and passion. She has become the eternal dualism and man has assiduously sought to comprehend her only through the mother. *Kali* or *Shakti* who magnifies terror is the mother ultimately; she punishes only to reward. But in life man has always found it hard, even impossible to come to terms with the wife in the woman. What he has failed to comprehend he has sought to suppress. The suppression has become an obsession. Woman is dreaded and held in control. She is always under the dominance of the father, the husband and the son. She is the *Sudra*, and her god is her husband. Without her husband she is an outcaste. After his death, she either self-immolates on the funeral pyre or lives the life of an ascetic outcaste. Her only basis for existence is her motherhood.

The mother in the woman has the counterpart in man, the son. Man has assiduously cultivated the son in him. He has conditioned himself to see the mother everywhere, ultimately also in his wife. One of the traditional blessings to a woman is: 'May you become the mother of ten children and may your husband be your eleventh'. When in the great epic the jewels of Sita are produced before Lakshmana, Lakshmana recognises only the anklets of his sister-in-law for he never looked 'the great mother' in the face for fear her beauty should provoke an unholy thought. Rama claims her after the great war only when the fire testifies to her chastity. This tradition has run alive through the centuries down to the present day. Vivekananda shocked a western woman when he addressed her as mother—'Do I look



so old?' And Gandhi made fantastic experiments with women to reinforce his chastity.

Chastity has become then the ultimate value, the greatest spiritual obsession. Sex is death as chastity is life, sex is evil and wrong as chastity is good and right.. But since sex is an inexorable reality it is accommodated as a necessary evil, a transitional evil for the ultimate end of chastity. Before man becomes a house-holder he lives a life of chastity, and after he has fulfilled himself as a house-holder he embraces chastity again. Sex is a passing interlude in the rigorous scheme of life.

Being so rigorously inhibited, sex when expressed breaks all barriers. It tends to be excessive, exclusive, and self-conscious. It wanders out of the living context of life and becomes an end pursued for its own sake. It becomes a principle of pleasure unhampered by moral or spiritual restraints. Indeed, it transmutes itself into a self-contained pursuit which seeks to comprehend the mystery of life through its specialised mode of vision. Tradition likens the sexual ecstasy to the spiritual joy of liberation. The author of the *Kamasutra* undertakes to explore sex as the only ecstasy which is within the reach of every man and which will do in place of the supreme spiritual joy accessible only to a chosen few.

Sex as pleasure becomes a specialisation. It becomes a function, a technique, a science. It is guided by formulas, by *Kamasutra*, as the book is aptly called. It becomes a pursuit and the profession of an exclusive class. Courtesan and Devadasis practise it in a world of moral-spiritual immunity. The courtesan deceives and dissembles and that is the very style of her profession and she is as untroubled by moral scruples as the king in the statecraft and the merchant in trade. Functional perfection divests itself of moral obligation. Temples display intricate physical postures, their very contiguity with the gods inside the temple ensuring them moral immunity. The gods and goddesses in the temple have almost the same vital statistics as the erotic figures outside and the change of place changes the perspective, alters the attitude. Sex enjoys as complete a functional autonomy as religion, a position not different from the cult of 'art for art's sake'.

Now is the time to be chaste, it is so good to be chaste, like a river of cool water in my soul. I love the chastity now

that it flows between us. It is like fresh water and rain. How can men want wearisomely to philander?

Sex that culminates in the subtle lambency of chastity vivifies as it unifies creation of which man is an integral part. Man needs man as he needs woman and it is a relationship beyond sex, a companionship which enriches like nature:

‘Did you need Gerald?’ she asked one evening.

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘Aren’t I enough for you?’ she asked.

‘No,’ he said. ‘You are enough for me, as far as a woman is concerned. You are all women to me. But I wanted a man friend, as eternal as you and I are eternal’.

Sex to Lawrence was the most intimate of the touches. The look, the handshake and the physical consummation of sex are the degrees of intensity of the subtle flow of life.

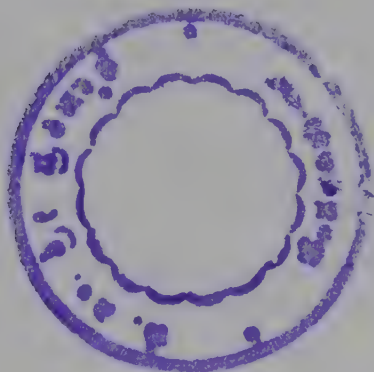
So they wrestled swiftly, rapturously, intent and mindless at last, two essential white figures working into a tighter closer oneness of struggle, with a strange, octopus-like knotting and flashing of limbs in the subdued light of the room; a tense white knot of flesh gripped in silence between the walls of old brown books. . . .

Lou’s relationship with the horse stems from the same subtle flow. It is not the conventional sex that quickens her—it is the horse, the ranch, even the little squirrel on the branch. Until this sex is realised the search continues. The women feel their inadequacy, wish they were men, men feel this want and crave for completion. Once they are fertilised they emerge free and individual. Sex, the great quickener, takes man beyond his social, biological functions and attaches him to nature where social and biological functions operate from a total consciousness not in exclusion, but in unison, in simultaneity. Only then the social and biological functions have meaning because they operate from the integrated consciousness, and are therefore true. Man meets man, woman and nature in that mystical state of the ‘other’—a state which is beyond the male and the female, a state not unlike the non-dual neuter consciousness of the *Upanishads* and the early Buddhism. Only what is philosophical and conceptual there is realised experientially, aesthetically.

Which takes Lawrence beyond tragedy—'We have got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen'. Society and civilisation cut in, but they do not affect the central core. In spite of civilisation Connie and the game-keeper are related beyond time and space. As for the evolving men:

They ought to learn to be naked and handsome, and to sing in a mass and dance the old group dances, and carve the stools they sit on, and embroider their own emblems. . . . They should be alive and frisky and acknowledge the great God Pan. He is the only god for the masses, for ever. The few can go in for higher cults if they like.

These few are for ever beyond, for ever the running flames. It is they that burn the boats and capture the 'insurgent naked throb of the instant moment' and are alive.





## WODEHOUSE AND THE LAY READER

K. R. RAMACHANDRAN

I MARVEL at my courage in venturing to stand before you this morning to read a paper. I however seek comfort in the thought that I am expected to speak of Wodehouse not as a scholar, not as a man of letters, but as a lay reader. And I make strong claim that I am the layest of the lay that ever spoke in a seminar of this sort. Having perhaps had a surfeit of what some would regard as the high-brow response to fiction, it is only fair that, for a change, you should get a dose this morning of what is undoubtedly going to be the low-brow response to fiction.

The name of P. G. Wodehouse is almost synonymous with humour of a most delectable variety wherever the English language is spoken. He has written prolifically, presumably because he depends on his writing for his bread and butter. It is interesting that when Wodehouse wanted to take to writing as a career, his father insisted that he should stick to a steady job somewhere and take to writing as a sideline, for Wodehouse Senior had no doubt that existence would become precarious for the Junior if he solely depended on writing for his sustenance. That is how P. G. Wodehouse first happened to take employment in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. But there he used the pages in the ledger that was entrusted to his care for satiating his scribbling itch. When the Bank Manager discovered that certain pages in the ledger entrusted to Wodehouse were missing, he thought he could seize this opportunity to settle an old score he had with the firm of stationers that had supplied the ledger to the Bank. The firm of stationers was very zealous of its reputation and demanded a full enquiry at the Bank end. Such an enquiry was actually undertaken and poor Wodehouse could not stand the rigour of a searching cross-examination by his boss, the Bank Manager. And that is how Wodehouse got his sack from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. But that was no calamity for Wodehouse for by that time he had discovered himself and was also able to convince his father that he could safely stand on his own, on the strength of his writing.

I must confess that of the three score and more novels written by Wodehouse, I have not read even a third. But just as it is not necessary for me to consume a whole potful of rice and curry before passing judgment on the quality of the cooking, I feel that even with my admittedly very limited knowledge of Wodehouse, I could record an appreciation which would not be unrealistic—whatever other demerits or lapses there might be in such appreciation.

One thing that sticks out when you read a Wodehouse story is that the story part is the least important. Wodehouse uses the abundant richness of the English language with such consummate skill and artistry to distil fun to an extraordinary extent out of quite common place-characters and common place occurrences. O'Casey once described Wodehouse, perhaps most appropriately, as 'English literature's performing flea'. The wonderful thing about the 'performing fleas is that it keeps giving amazing performances all the time. That is why one of Wodehouse's publishers expressed the view that it is perilous to make a selection of Wodehouse's writings, for Wodehouse is at his best all the time and it is therefore virtually impossible to select the best out of them.

The lay reader is grateful to Wodehouse for creating certain very interesting and memorable characters, who run through a number of his stories. The most notable among them is Jeeves—private gentleman of a private gentleman. Jeeves is, indeed, inimitable and without a peer. He always succeeds in pulling out his master and his master's friends out of the numerous scrapes they always have the knack of getting into. Indeed, Jeeves' Master Bertram Wooster is amazed how a single head can contain so much wisdom. 'What size hat you wear, Jeeves?' once asked Bertie Wooster and he was quite convinced that it ought to be an extraordinarily big size.

Another interesting Wodehousian character is Stanley Faulkner Ukridge who is always in financial distress. But he is never pessimistic, and his mind is full of the most goofy ideas: how money could be minted with effortless ease if only some one were to advance him the capital! This is the chap who always gives out a false name, and it is just his sense of ordinary business precaution. What is the secret of his friendship with Mr Corcoran

the narrator of all Ukridge stories? It is that he has about the same build as Corcoran and can use the latter's socks and shirts.

Then there is Bingo Little who is always falling in and falling out of love. If you put from end to end all the girls with whom Bingo had fallen in love some time or other, why, Piccadilly could have been easily girdled.

Tuppy Glossop is another Wodehouse character I like very much. He is an epicurean, but gets very irritated if you refer to this aspect of his nature. 'This talk that I am fond of food must end', Tuppy would say, 'Of course, I have a healthy appetite and can consider whatever decent preparations are laid on the table. But that does not mean I am fond of food'. He was once given the advice that he could impress his lady-love by laying off food at the dinner table, and thus giving the impression that he is pining away for her sake. It passed his comprehension how any one under any circumstances could expect him to pass over a steak prepared by that supreme artist of a cook called Anatole. He was eventually prevailed upon to accept the advice after an assurance that nothing prevented him from sneaking into the kitchen after everyone had slept at night and letting himself go on the steak there. On another occasion, it was suggested that if an opportunity was created where he could meet his lady-love in the garden against the background of a setting sun, the romantic set up might help foster relations. Bertie Wooster's comment in respect of this suggestion was that a setting sun would only remind Tuppy of an omelette just cooked right! On still another occasion, Jeeves suggested that if Bertie were to raise a fire alarm at dead of night Tuppy might rush to his lady-love, as psychologically, one always rushes to the succour of the most loved ones in times of emergency. Bertie observed that if that were so Tuppy would more likely rush to the kitchen to save the beef steak and the pudding!

Few among Wodehousian creations can equal Lord Emsworth of Blandings Castle and his pig Empress of Blandings in the joy they bring to the readers. Lord Emsworth is a dreary absent-minded Earl, dominated by his sister Constance, whose one and only interest in life is his pig Empress of Blandings. The Empress of Blandings' had won twice in succession the first prize in 'Fat Pigs Contest' in the Shropshire Agricultural Show. If it had not, there is no doubt that Emsworth would have given



hell to the judges. His favourite book is Whiffle on 'The care of pigs'. But he gets terribly annoyed if the Empress of Blandings were to be referred to by any one as a pig. 'Fancy calling the Empress a mere pig', he would exclaim in righteous indignation.

There are other interesting characters too—there is Sir Roderick Glossop the brain specialist who has an uncanny way of sorting out people in two baskets—'looney' and 'not looney', the number on the looney side, far outnumbering the number on the non-looney side; there is Gussie Fink Nottle the newt-fancier who cannot say 'bo' to a goose; there is Psmith (spelt p-s-m-i-t-h) who is ready to help you in anything including the assassination of an undesirable ~~ant~~, provided the job has nothing to do with fish; there is Uncle Fred whom you can catch at his best only at spring time and in London.

The Wodehouse characters fill the readers' hearts with delight not only by their goofiness but also by the brilliance of the conversation amongst them. One can open at random any page in a Wodehouse story and be treated to conversation that radiates wit and humour through every line that is written. I have, at considerable risk, selected two passages which illustrate the point. Listen to a conversation between Betram Wooster and Jeeves about a check suit which Bertie thought was wonderful, while Jeeves held a contrary view:

'O Jeeves, about that check suit.'

'Yes sir'.

'Is it really a frost?'

'A trifle too bizarre, sir, in my opinion'.

'But lots of fellows have asked me who my tailor is.'

'Doubtless to avoid him, sir.'

'He's supposed to be one of the best men in London'.

'I am saying nothing against his moral character, sir'.

Listen now to another conversation. This is between Bertie Wooster and his pal Bingo Little.

'Oh, Great Scott! Don't tell me you are in love again'.

Bingo seemed aggrieved.

'What do you mean—again?'

'Well to my certain knowledge you've been in love with at least half-a-dozen girls since the spring, and it is only July now.

There was that waitress, and Honoria Glossop. . . .'

'O tush! Not to say pish! Those girls? Mere passing fancies. This is the real thing'.

'Where did you meet her?'

'On top of a bus. Her name is Charlotte Corday Rowbotham'.

'My God!'

'It is not her fault, poor child. Her father had her christened that because he's all for the Revolutions...'

The conversations delight us even where the reasoning is palpably absurd. A Wodehouse character, when accused of complicity in some foul mischief, emphatically denied the charge on the ground that at the hour of alleged mischief he was sound asleep in his bed. If you want any proof, you may go and see—the bed is still there! Bingo Little once falls in love with a girl called Cynthia and is struggling to compose a poem on her to impress her with his love. This is how Bingo bemoans his plight: 'I wish the dickens she had been christened something except Cynthia. There isn't a damn word in the language it rhymes with. Ye gods, how I could have spread myself if she had been called Jane'.

A lay reader cannot also fail to appreciate Wodehouse's choice of expression, which is always very telling and very graphic. This is how he describes a person who is much depressed and run-down: 'If an undertaker had seen him at that time he would have looked up and exclaimed 'Ha, I scent business'. Again, listen how Wodehouse tries to convey to you the idea that a person is ugly-looking: 'It is as though God wanted to create a gargoyle, changed his mind in the eleventh hour and made him a man instead'. On an occasion like this I cannot fail to invite attention to Wodehouse's description of a character called Spode consuming soup: 'It was like the Scotch Express passing through the tunnel'.

A thirteen year old kid known for his naughtiness is described as a 'pot of poison', 'a kid of outstanding foulness', 'England's premier fiend in human shape', 'a scourge of humanity whom a too indulgent public had allowed to infest the country for a matter of thirteen years', 'England's premier wart', etc.

It is not only in fiction that you find Wodehousian expressions so enchanting. No Wodehousian expression taken from fiction can be as cute as the dedication of one of his book to his daughter. The dedication reads thus: 'To my daughter ... but for whose



co-operation this work would have been finished in half the time'.

I have so far attempted to show what delightful reading material Wodehouse has furnished for the lay reader. Yet one may ask: Of what advantage is it for the layman to read Wodehouse? Does it enhance his knowledge? Does it elevate his mind? If not, why should one dissipate oneself reading Wodehouse?

I do not know if I am competent to answer questions of this sort. But I do know this: reading Wodehouse gives readers undiluted pleasure, a pleasure that does not inebriate, a pleasure that, without doubt, enriches one's being. What other justification is necessary then for reading Wodehouse?

Though the pleasure that could be derived is itself more than adequate justification, I think reading Wodehouse enables one to develop a sense of humour, a capacity for laughing at one-self occasionally. V. K. Krishna Menon in his book *The Theory of Laughter* has pointed out how the ability to laugh at one-self is essentially a sign of strength. He has observed how some of Shakespeare's heroes lacked this strength and so were unable to head off disaster. Take for example King Lear. If only King Lear could have said to Cordelia: 'What a matter-of-fact child thou art?' the whole story of King Lear would have been different. We may not subscribe to Krishna Menon's interpretation of the character of the tragic heroes of Shakespeare. But it cannot be gainsaid that a well-developed sense of humour enables us to live through life with a greater degree of comfort. To the extent that Wodehouse enables us to develop our sense of humour there is added justification for reading Wodehouse.

It is, however, possible that Wodehouse may not delight one and all. A Johnson may generalise: 'If a man is tired of London, he is tired of life'. But it will not be proper for me to generalise: 'If a man does not like Wodehouse, it means he has no sense of humour'. The Indian humorist S.V.V. once referred to the fabled donkey who burst into song to win his master's affection but only succeeded in getting a good hiding. S.V.V. observes that the donkey must nevertheless have been convinced about the master's poor taste in music. I shall not, even for the sake of Wodehouse, make the same mistake as this fabled donkey and question the sense of humour of such as there might be who



are not amused by Wodehouse. But I am only making a plain statement of fact when I say that Wodehouse through his writings has given several hours of joy to millions of lay readers throughout the world, wherever the English language is spoken.

Legend has it that a distinguished former Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University once said: 'I do not mind going to hell if I am allowed to take my Wodehouse with me'. There is nothing *infra dig* about this pleasure. I am reminded of the famous lines of Tagore:

Pearl fishers dive for pearls;  
Merchants sail in their ships:  
Children gather pebbles and scatter them again;  
They seek not for hidden pleasures.

I think the pleasure that one derives from Wodehouse is akin to the pleasure that children derive gathering pebbles on the sea-shore and scattering them again. This is to say, Wodehouse may not assist us in advancing ourselves materially; but he gives us a satisfaction that is its own reward and justification for reading him.

There is no justification for any one to intrude between Wodehouse and the lay reader. In the case of an author like Shakespeare commentators are useful, even necessary. Many a lay reader would stand to gain immeasurably if he were to read *Macbeth* or *Othello* after or along with Bradley's commentaries thereon. In our literature too we might parrot-like repeat all the verses of the *Gita* day in and day out, and not be any the better for it. A commentator like Shankara or Sri Aurobindo would undoubtedly enable us to appreciate the *Gita*. But not so in the case of Wodehouse. Commentaries, introductions, annotations, explanations are wholly superfluous. I therefore wish to close this paper by echoing from the bottom of my heart the following words of publisher Ogden Nash: 'Me, I prefer to read Wodehouse.'

# AN ESSAY ON THE FRUSTRATION OF THE YOUNG, CORRUPTION OF THE OLD AND THE RISE OF MASS PERIODICALS

M. GOVINDAN

'He read a paper on decadence at a meeting of our Circle. And just a couple of days after he committed suicide. All of us are terribly upset by the incident'.

So wrote my friend, a poet who teaches Malayalam language and literature in Brënnen College, Tellichery. I knew the teachers, students, and middle-class employees who formed the Democratic Study Circle. I had acted as the *de facto* director of a seminar organised by them on 'The Growing Generation in Search of New Horizons'. The papers presented for discussion dealt with complex issues like Renaissance, Problem of Two Cultures, and the Right of the Young Generation to rebel. *That* young man was also present on the occasion. If I remember correctly, he did not participate in the discussion actively, but was very attentive to what others were saying. 13463

Why did he commit suicide? And that too, soon after recording his thoughts on the frustration and decadence he found all around and submitting them to his friends for an exchange of views and experience? While reading out passages on decadence, was he contemplating to put an end to his life to escape from its evil effects? Was it a revengeful protest or a play of sheer melancholia? I do not know. But I know this much: there is something basically wrong with the existing state of affairs that drives sensitive young minds to self-annihilation.

Nearly thirty years ago, another Malayalee youth had taken his life,—Edappally Raghavan Pillai, a brilliant poet in his early twenties. By nature and accomplishment his death was an elaborately premeditated murder at one's own hands. That made it all the more miserable and significant.

Two poems he wrote on his projected suicide stand out as the best pieces of lyrics in Malayalam literature. Raghavan Pillai composed two poems on the eve of his deathly deliberations: *Maninada*. (Knell) and *Nalathe Prabhatam* (Tomorrow's

Dawn). The first poem portrayed his decisive mental state and evidenced readiness to do away with his life. It applauded the ringing sweetness of the knell; bade farewell to all,—friends, near and dear, sweet-heart, his golden pen, rivers and valleys, moon and mountains and, of course, farewell to the unsympathetic and unrepentant world.

The second poem described his last wish the physical throw-out of a delicate soul, crushed under the accumulated weight of cruelty and indifference, returning to the final refuge, the loving lap of Mother Nature; the yearning to meet death in the form of light and freshness of the coming dawn. 'I have set fire to my little thatched hut to come to you' concludes the piece.

The poems appeared in two popular weeklies, *Mathrubhumi* and *Malayalarajyam*, a piece in each. Their publication coincided with the sad news of the poet's suicide. The coincidence had nothing strange about it. The whole affair was pre-arranged in detail, every bit of it scrupulously planned and executed by the poet himself. No mystery shrouded his demise. His was a martyr's end. A lonely forlorn lover offering the flower of his very life at the feet of love. True to the spirit of a lyric poet he did not get into hysterical outbursts. His mellifluous voice meandered through the dry area of his experience, evocative of the expansive patterns of despair and doom and vibrating the sympathetic chords curled up in the innermost recesses of human soul.

Raghavan Pillai's bosom friend and fellow-poet, Changampuzha wrote a pastoral elegy in dramatic verse on the tragic event—*Ramanan*. It had a record sale of a lakh of copies in print. The number of copies circulated in manuscript form will be twofold. For two decades *Ramanan* was a bestseller, as a teenager's testament and a kind of 'Sorrows of Werther' in Malayalam. Raghavan Pillai was a fine lyric poet with strong hues of melancholy merged in his timbre and tones. His sudden disappearance from the literary scene, as love's martyr, was a great loss to the lovers of Malayalam poetry. It provided, on the other hand, an occasion to many minor poets toying with melancholic romanticism for a thorough self-analysis. The hangover remained for some time in the literary atmosphere till it was melted in the optimistic heat produced by the Progressive Writers' Movement which found its vehicle in realistic fiction and protest poetry.



Kumari Rajalakshmi, Professor of Physics, won recognition and reputation with the publication of her maiden novel. Her works have a rare charm and vigour which delve deep into the usually inaccessible chambers of human psyche. Agony is their essential note, not in the form of loud lamentations and breast beatings, but agony in mute refrain and silent suffering; the stirring rings of the Sitar-strings that one does not hear, yet visibly feel and react to. The creative flame flickered and burned in her so intensely that it flowed in immense measure into her literary works. The warmth and sparks they generated occasioned unhappy experiences and painful days of predicament to the author.

Vicious scandal-mongering, engineered by interested parties, intended to put a stop to her literary pursuit, disturbed her; but did not succeed in its aim. Protests, challenges, threats and vituperative whispers were hurled at her from unexpected quarters. There were allegations too to the effect that the plots and characters in her works were modelled on or adapted from the lives of her intimate friends and colleagues and that she did this jealously to mar their marital peace and happiness. The more cynical and callous among the accusers condemned them as sinister literary witchcraft indulged in by a desperately sadistic spinster.

The publisher of a weekly had to discontinue her serial novel abruptly in the middle under severe external pressure.

When Professor Rajalakshmi felt that the conspiracy of circumstances had cornered her at last and that the conflict of value judgements prevented her even from transforming her anguish into creative self-expression and communication, she got inside the bath-room, one morning, and hanged herself. The tragedy occurred about six months ago when Rajalakshmi was thirty-five years old. Naturally the literati were shocked by the event; they wrote elegies, essays and evaluations of her literary achievement. While doing so they resurrected the memory of late Edappally Raghavan Pillai too. I am not sure whether the characters and incidents in Rajalakshmi's works are drawn from real lives straight away or the fictional portraits find their factual resemblance and actual angularities in living men and women by way of strange coincidence or malicious auto-suggestion. Realistic writing, raw and rough-hewn, shows often a tendency to slip into actual reportage. There are living characters too in our society suffering from persecution mania and ready reflexes

to identify themselves with literary situations, under the spell of a peculiar psychosis to live differently. Rajalakshmi's writing belonged to a separate genre. So both the possibilities were remote in this context. Ultimately, it is the question of objective standard in literary ethics and evaluation, which presupposes a sane society composed of integrated individuals.

## II

The forced inter-penetration of the opposites, tradition and modernity in Indian society, has resulted in a sort of stagnation and imbalance. The basic generating power that evolves mobility and dynamism in social structure and individual strivings is practically locked out. The alternative is not the acceptance of the hide-bound tradition or the imitative involvement with the artificially-grafted modernity. This indecisive milieu with its irritating, piecemeal method of a shallow *either-or* situation has made value systems invalid, social matrix frigid, individual life indifferent and cultural configurations corrosive. The Indian mind caught in between contradictory directions had become the arena of internal dichotomy. There is also the feeling of alienation among the middle-class intelligentsia, without the societal built-in-safety methods and individual compensatory idiosyncracies that their western prototypes have, to sublimate the alienation into creative assertion and aggressive self-expression.

The close-ups of the three suicides illustrate the degree of frustration that creeps into the sensitive minds and its tragic entanglements. Why should men and women in the prime of their lives get fed up with the instinctive quest of living? The original motive of life is to live; to rupture its pattern by conscious choice entails abnormal behaviour, freeing oneself by ceasing to be. The act of taking one's own life requires extra-ordinary courage and heroic desperation.

The man who wrote an essay on decadence and put a fullstop to the whole thing not with a dot but with his young life itself, did not act on a sudden self-destructive impulse. The same is the case with the other two. The calculated characteristics and the belabouring nature of the events invest them with a revengeful showmanship. All the three who had died by their own hands had thrown the gauntlet at the face of the world along with their life.



At the penultimate moment they found no other weapon but life to challenge the world. They risked it to inflict a wound and scar on its conscience.

That these incidents are from a particular area, i.e., Kerala limits further discussion on the plane of generalisation. The universality of the human condition is quite often abstract and vague in details. Is it possible that these suicides have something to do with the ethos and mythos of Kerala? The narrow strip of land that lies between the mountains and the sea has its unique social geography. Does it evolve a particular cultural climate capable of influencing the norms and mores of the people with distinctive accents and attitudes towards life?

Swami Vivekananda characterised Kerala as a veritable lunatic asylum. The callous behaviour of the custodians of the caste-ridden society that existed there when the Swamiji visited the land was the provocation for this comment. Has Kerala become, after the lapse of decades, a den of suicidal maniacs from a crowded mad house? Anyway, there is something radically paradoxical about this part of India. May be this is because of the original sin, not of Semitic variety, but of a strictly swedeshi type.

The legendary maker of Kerala is Parasurama, the seventh Avatar of Mahavishnu. Though a saint in the lineage and living, Parasurama was also a persistent sinner haunted by guilt-complex. He carried the heavy burden of guilt in his heart and a sharp-edged huge axe on the shoulder. The Assassination Incarnate who massacred twentyone generations of Kshathriyas, Parasurama could accomplish such ferocious deeds of destruction in succession singlehanded as he belonged to a rare specimen of Avatars a *chiranjeevi*, the everliving.

Even saints, under the weight of their crimes, turn repentent sinners. Parasurama performed *prayachhitha* to absolve himself from the accumulated sin by offering land to Brahmins. The legend says that Parasurama, standing on the summit of Sahyadri, threw away his blood-stained axe into the Arabian sea, and lo! there emerged the land from the sea stretching to the point where the tip of the axe had fallen.

The entire new-found land was given away to Namboodiris. (The originator of the Bhoodan ideal is not Vinoba Bhave but the murderous offspring of Brighu). It is only logical if Malayalees



have inherited this sinful trait. They are adepts in overthrowing governments, any government irrespective of party affiliation and composition for that matter, Communist, PSP, Congress etc. Nowadays they do not perform the ritual in the barbarous way as their patron saint did but in the most democratic and non-violent manner. Malayalees have succeeded in grafting Gandhian ideals on Parasurama rituals. There is nothing unusual about this kind of blending. Once men were breaking human heads to propitiate Gods; now they break cocoanuts instead. Heads, by means of votes to the politicians and nuts to Gods is the modern ritual.

The other legacy that has come to Malayalees from the Founding Father, Parasurama Complex, has more contextual relevance. It is less known than Oedipus Complex which has acquired universal currency, thanks to the fads and fashions of post-Freudian pundits and literati. Equally significant is Parasurama Complex—murdering of the mother to gain the affection of father. Saint Parasurama killed his mother instantly at the behest of Brighu who became suspicious of his wife's moral character. The Indian saints are famous for two special attributes: insatiable thirst for the understanding of the Absolute and an unreasonable amount of misunderstanding of their wives' alleged moral aberrations. Saint Brighu was no exception.

Malayalees are aware of this complex, its variations and metamorphosis, throughout their history. They tried to circumvent the original guilt by the introduction of matriarchal system. For some time it worked. Of late, there has been a relapse. The guilt complex is back again with vengeance through inverted channels of murder transmuted into suicide and character assassination. Murder, martyrdom and suicide belong to the same family. They are first cousins if not of the same parentage.

### III

Can we blame the recklessness of youths for their lack of love for life? 'Oh, the young fellows have no faith in values. They are an indifferent lot, sponging on their elders, capable of only taking things rather than making them. They take their life too to survive despair'. There is some truth in this kind of argumentation, but only an element of it.

What is wrong with the young generation? If there is any, is it their own making? Or is it true that the sins of fathers visit on their children? Then the wrong is with the older generation too. But the old generation refuse to stand by the confession box. They prefer to become pontiffs, prescribing behaviour patterns and palliatives. The old generation in our country is too tired a generation to retire from the positions they hold and the seats they occupy! You can't even qualify them by the word generation since they have ceased to generate anything.

Imagine the atrocious artificiality and the vast distance between a twenty-year old post-graduate student and a post-septuagenarian Vice-Chancellor. How could one expect that a man with one foot in the grave-yard and the other in the University's sanctum-sanctorum to generate wisdom, confidence and discipline among the young students? These venerable men have become part of the Establishment as the furniture. Their dehydrated orthodoxy and intellectual anaemia play havoc and produce chain-reactions of furore in the educational institutions. Thanks to the University Grants Commission, the universities and colleges have purchased new furniture to adore the rooms and halls. But, for what purpose!

Suffice to say: there cannot be continuous and effective dialogue between persons who are so different in age and aptitude. Freedom, culture and educational pursuits need a certain level of mutual understanding for discourse, dissemination and development. 'Our youth love luxury. They have bad manners and contempt for authority. They show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up their food and tyrannize their teachers.' Who made this damning observation? A frustrated political boss, a superannuated bureaucrat or a dyed-in-the-wool grand-dad in 1965?

No. This verdict came from Socrates, the very sage who was accused of corrupting the manners and morals of the Greek Youth 2,500 years ago. The angry men belonging to the old generation in India repeat the same without any qualm of conscience. Socrates courted martyrdom in the course of his struggle to change the youth of his day. The old man was a rebel, debunker, teacher, loafer and a formidable dialectician—all rolled into one.

Let it be plainly said that I do not hold any brief for the youth of India; nor do they need any defence. I am of the view that it is better to discuss the problem of the present day youth with all the implications and involvements. If the youth are bad the burden of blame must mainly be borne by the elders. The expected span of their life is naturally longer than that of ours and as such the youth can afford to be a little slow in improving themselves. The older generation can quicken the process both by precept and practice. Would they care or have the courage to do so? I am not very optimistic.

Frustration among the youth is, no doubt, fraught with serious consequences. Yet it is less frightening than the careerism of the middle-aged and the corruption of the old. As one can envisage the evolution of cosmos from chaos, it is logical to expect the prospect of frustration crystallising into some positive form of fraternal collaboration and free living. No such eventuality will arise from crass careerism. Careerism may, at the most, fossilise into callous cynicism and corruption which will cause the corrosion of conscience. The impact of such a catastrophe on the youth will be terrible. It will make the frustrated youth more frustrated and desperate, ultimately throwing them into the hands of a pseudo-Saviour who will find the young minds so fertile to sow the dragon seeds of authoritarian creeds.

#### IV

What are the books and periodicals that a young man reads? That depends on many a factor.

If he is a student he has to read text books and reference works. If he is a student in Kerala he may not even read them. He has his guides, made ready by innumerable tutorial publishers. If he is on travel he buys the pulp periodicals and glossy magazines with tricolour pictures of film stars on the cover and two or three sexy and detective stories between the covers. At times he may go in for a book. But books are comparatively expensive. He can get a film magazine at lesser cost.

Blessed are the publishers of such periodicals. Even if they carry no ideas and imagination, they quickly reach the richman's paradise. What about the readers? That is a different matter. I have seen people, men, women, old and young standing in queue



to buy a Malayalam weekly. Its total circulation at present will be more than two lakhs. The cultivated say it has no standard. Still they buy the paper week after week. Educated persons, supposed to be enlightened, business executives, writers and artistes, old pandits, gazetted gentry, workers, peasants, all classes of people patronise this paper. It is the Sunday Opium. Without it the house-wives cannot get along. They eagerly wait at the doorsteps in the evening to snatch away the latest copy from their office-returning husbands.

The title of this miraculous mass periodical: *Malayalam-anorama*. Size: Demy Quarto; Pages: 36, Price: 13 paise a copy (Thirteen, it is said, is an unlucky number. But there can be exception to superstition too). This journal provides everything, fun and frolic (it is the readers' responsibility to supply them every week, besides reading them), two serial stories, two short stories, a page of children's cartoon, one or two poems, illustrated articles, and of course, picture stories provided by the advertisers. Even the advertisement appeals: Use these blades for matrimonial happiness. There is the picture of a chic house-wife instructing her man to buy only this brand of blades. The advertisements are interspersed between the serial and non-serial stories each contributing to the other, by contract as well as by contradiction. Suppose there is the story of an old beggar woman on the right page there will be the advertisement with a picture of a beauty on the left declaring: all you need is *Snow*.

*Malayalam-anorama* has originated new a type of writing and hence new way of reading also. It has innovated a special kind of serial story. As soon as the editor accepts the manuscript from the author it is sent for 'action' to a troupe of young men and women. The illustrations of the story are real-life-photos; so you get a story plus a film. To incorporate this novel feature the serial must be renamed FILERIAL. If a story has a circus theme, a circus show is arranged and photos are taken. How do they manage these impossible things, you may wonder. I too have the same feeling. But it happens; it is done week by week. It thrills thousands of readers and they write to the editor for more of these FILERIAL. The stories are not outright pornographic nor are the fringes of obscenity on which they impinge boldly drawn. But words and images are intertwined together to create an air of illicit voluptuousness and vulgarity. It is very

subtle, but it catches. Once you are caught you want more of the grip. The editor commissions serial story writers. There is a host of them at his beck and call, young, aspiring enthusiasts. Once they get a chance to write a FILERIAL they are sure to get commissions from film producers. FILERIALS are not of a literary genre even though words find place in them; not movie though photos constitute a part of the medium.

The publishers of these magazines are good and well-intentioned men. Even if they want to stop the publication the people won't allow them to do so, particularly those who are under twenty. There is no deliberate designing behind the venture of this mass periodical. It is a freak fed and fertilised by morbid manners and psychological moorings. I think even the owners are afraid of the success. It is said that once they called the editor and asked him to see that the circulation went down so that they could use the newsprint for the Daily. He was asked to publish contributions without any standard. Smiling, the editor submitted: 'Then the circulation will go further up'. He was right as experience substantiated later.

The phenomenal success of *Malayalamanorama* in the field of circulation is causing headache to others in the business.

Weeklies started to propagate ideals and devoted to cultural advancement began to wake up like RIP WAN WINKLE. After all circulation counts; it is the index of success in the world of business and commerce. The spread of literacy, industrial expansion, transport facilities and new communication media demand mass circulation periodicals. The Rotary Press is another factor. Without a good Rotary you can't run a mass daily. Most of the pulp periodicals are the fat calves of the daily cows. Rotary Press is the modern Bakasura demanding rolls of newsprint for his daily food. Along with the newsprint the machine sucks and drains the cultural vitality of the people too. It is the modes of production that determines the material and spiritual aspects of life, said Karl Marx. Since then, non-Marxians have written volumes to disprove this century-old contention. In so far as the cultural advancement or decay associated with the slick periodicals, Marxian view still holds good to a great extent. Here the machine moves man. His ideas are determined by machine.



A vivid example of a cultural and literary weekly coming down from its earlier standard in the process of commercial competition is *Mathrubhumi*. From its very inception this periodical championed the cause of national culture and literary renaissance. It did not aim at mass circulation in those days. Its declared aim was to educate the people on the Gandhian lines. It fought against the encroachment on the freedom of the press and expression; risked many a temptation, courted the displeasure of the then rulers and stood steadfast for the preservation of national honour and culture.

After all the glorious struggle and achievement where does it stand now? *Mathrubhumi* which had about 20,000 copies of circulation in 1950 has now reached a lakh. It is edited by a well-known poet, critic and man of cultivated taste. He succeeded in improving the standard and getting the co-operation of many new and significant writers who used to keep away from the paper because of its anti-progressive archaic idealism. From 1950 onwards for a decade or so *Mathrubhumi* was one of the well edited weeklies of India. It gave space for new writers, published avant-garde writing, and encouraged poets and artists. It still does this to an extent. But the earlier boldness is absent.

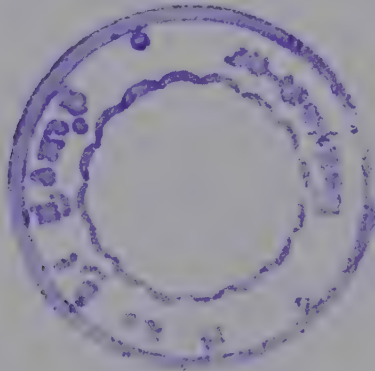
To illustrate another point I shall narrate a real story. Some of the now well-known writers used to send stories to *Mathrubhumi* for favour of publication, unasked when they were not so popular. These stories were their best works. But they did not suit the smug idealism that *Mathrubhumi* embraced in those days. (I am talking of the forties) The then editor put these stories into the waste-paper basket—since there were no self-addressed stamped covers accompanying the contributions. These disappointed writers got their stories published in small periodicals with limited circulation. Years lapsed and most of the writers lost their original rebellious spirit and challenging tones and even artistic integrity and fervour. Then *Mathrubhumi* approached them for serials offering handsome payment. Of course, they gave serials. When one compares them with the earlier rejected stories of those authors now circulating in book form one cannot but say: 'Alas', to whom I wonder.

Courage of conviction and craze for popularity seldom march together. It is not the intellectual equipment and literary judgement of the editor that count ultimately in the popular periodicals



but his ability to boost up circulation in order to outwit others in the field. Every editor faces this predicament. This problem is not confined to Kerala alone. The strong trend in modern periodical journalism is towards mass mesmerism through the written word and colourful illustrations. When one compares *Mathrubhumi* with its prototypes in other parts of India this much need be said: *Mathrubhumi* weekly still retains a standard, and for this difficult feat, laurels should go to its editor.

This is the fate of every periodical which aims at commercial success and popularity on the top of everything else. Why blame others? We have to blame ourselves. To swim against the current is no *Thamasha*. Those who can do it will do it of their own choice. Those who do not want to, will not do it whatever others may say.



## SLICK MAGAZINES IN TAMIL

### Their Literary Merit and their impact on Fiction

KA NAA SUBRAMANYAM

THE first novel in the Tamil language was published in book form in 1869. The second novel appeared as a serial in monthly parts in a periodical called *Viveka Chintamani* in the middle of the nineties. The third novel too appeared as a serial. There is no knowing now whether the two novels were composed at a stretch or written as a serial, part by part. In the case of Rajam Iyer's *Kamalaambal* we can guess that the parts were written one after another as towards the end the vedantic import is rather overridingly heavy. The periodical press thus early came to have an influence on longer fiction in Tamil.

After the first three novels appeared in the 19th century, the first three decades of the present century produced very little fiction of any merit. But to the writing of novels there was no end and many a novelist of that period complains of the practices of his fellow-practitioners. A number of adaptations of English and, through English, European novels appeared and a large number of them appeared in the periodical press which was taking shape in Tamil. The socialistic (for that time) melodramas of G. W. M. Reynolds were the prime favourites. Five volume, ten volume adaptations of his novels exist in two or three different versions. The fiction of Mrs Henry Wood, Ouida, Douglas Jerrold, Maria Edgeworth and others were also known and popular. At this period the journals could not have been great influences in Tamil.

In the twenties an able adapter of G. W. M. Reynolds—besides other writers like Victor Hugo, Conan Doyle and the Greek legends—one Vaduvor Doraiswamy Iyengar issued his novels in serial monthly parts called *Manoranjitham*, pleasing to the mind. Owing to business incapacity the magazine did not live long, though it had at that time the unprecedented support of over 3,000 subscribers. Doraiswamy Iyengar's associate, friend and

imitator in fiction Vai Mu Kothainayakai Ammal launched a magazine called *Jaganmohini* for publishing her novels in serial parts—of the original 'O Rare Amanda!' variety. This monthly magazine was quite popular from the first and starting with a circulation of a couple of thousand copies ended in the middle fifties with a circulation of nearly 15,000 copies at the death of the authoress who had through its pages given the Tamil world as many as 120 novels both long and short.

The Gandhian era in Indian politics gave a new fillip and interest and scope to periodical journalism and the early works of fiction attempted in these periodicals were more or less unimpressive adaptations of a vapid kind. In the early thirties *Ananda Vikatan* weekly emerged as a powerful medium of entertainment, carrying mainly short stories, skits, cartoons, news items and comment and occasionally serials. The opposite number to *Ananda Vikatan* in this period was *Manikkodi* which had a serious interest in literary creation and not mere entertainment. *Manikkodi* did not become a business success; it never achieved a more than 2,000 circulation; it struggled for a few years against *Ananda Vikatan*, gave a fillip to serious short stories in Tamil and gave up the struggle by the end of the thirties. It did not attempt any longer fiction seriously, though what it did attempt was left incomplete.

Towards the end of the thirties, *Ananda Vikatan* became more interested in serialising longer fiction in its pages, though it had even earlier published a number of novels and conducted prize competitions for the novel the results of which were practically negligible. In the novels of Kalki and S.V.V. and Thumil-lan and later on Devan, *Ananda Vikatan* managed to set up a trend which continues to this day. In the early forties, Kalki the erstwhile *de facto* editor of *Ananda Vikatan* left it and started a magazine of his own, *Kalki*. Towards the end of the forties, *Kumudham* first as a trimonthly and later as a Weekly caught the popular imagination of the Tamils and carried on the work of *Ananda Vikatan* and *Kalki* in longer fiction at an even more popular level so that its two elder contemporaries had to sit up and take notice and conform to *Kumudham* standards. A monthly started in the early thirties as a journal of education and information *Kalaimagal* later in the first four of five years of the forties carried on the work of *Manikkodi* in the short story but



in the novel satisfied itself with offering to the Tamil reader translations from the Bengali and the Hindi. Later in the fifties *Kalaimagal* too tried to conform to the standards made familiar to the Tamil reader by *Kumudham*, *Kalki* and *Ananda Vikatan*. *Dinamani Kadhir* was another popular weekly that rose in the fifties and strove to do the work that the others also were doing. Recently in the sixties *Raani* is a weekly that follows faithfully the standards set by the other popular magazines and seems to have achieved an enviable circulation.

*Ananda Vikatan*, *Kumudham* and *Raani*, we are told, have a circulation of well over two hundred thousand copies a week. *Kalki* and *Kalaimagal*—the first a weekly and the second a monthly—achieve a circulation of nearly a hundred thousand copies for each issue. When one talks of slick magazines in Tamil, these are the five magazines that rise to my mind. Of these, *Ananda Vikatan* and *Kalaimagal* are in their fourth decade of publication, *Kalki* in its third decade, *Kumudham* in its second and *Raani* in its first. They are popular, they publish fiction of a particular escapist variety conforming to a formula and reach many houses in Tamilnad. From 1940 onwards these magazines and later *Raani* have been publishing novels—each publishes as many as three novels at a time normally—and each serial runs at an average from 26 to 52 weeks.

I shall also name another Weekly, the *Swadesamitran* which does not circulate very widely but has been able to make itself felt. This journal also publishes as many as three serials a week when it cannot find space for more. When I have mentioned another monthly, the *Amudha Surabhi* which also is in the same circulation bracket as *Swadesamitran Weekly* (fifteen to twenty thousand copies an issue), I have, I think, mentioned all the magazines of the popular kind in Tamil. In the material they publish it will be hard indeed to distinguish one from the other; most of the popular names recur in these magazines though a few are jealously 'retained' in a few cases.

I shall also add that to offset the popular trend in literature there has not been very effective serious literary attempts at little reviews. *Manikkodi* appeared between 1933 and 1939, *Sooravali* for six months in 1939. *Bharatha Devi* for six months in 1939. *Kalaamohini* for 3 years in 1940 to 1943, *Grama Oozhiyan* from 1941 to 1946, *Chandrothayam* from 1945 to 1947, *Theni* in 1948.

For nearly ten years between 1948 and 1958 there were no little magazines at all in Tamil, till C. S. Chellappa started his *Ezhuthu* which has been in existence from 1958. These little magazines did yeoman work in the short story and *Ezhuthu* in literary criticism and in new poetry; they did not seriously interest themselves in longer fiction and whatever they attempted was incomplete.

This is the general background information against which I hope to offer a few comments and conclusions in the following sections. The material for a study of the literary merit and the impact of these magazines on longer fiction is almost non-existent and what I say is only a personal view based on my own study.

## II

I shall deal first with the work of *Kalki* in longer fiction. *Kalki* was the pseudonym of R. Krishnamurthi who was the dominant factor and influence in Tamil journalism in general and in fiction in particular. He dominated the literary scene for nearly twenty-five years from 1930 to the middle of the fifties when he died—this was the period in which the taste of the Tamil reader settled into what it is now and *Kalki* had a say in the matter. He was editor of both *Ananda Vikatan* and *Kalki* in their most influential and dominant periods.

He began as an entertainer, as a humorist out to help the uncertain Tamil reader to pass the time pleasantly. As a professional journalist forced to submit so much copy to the printing machine at stated intervals, he drew his inspiration from various sources—Stephen Leacock and Mark Twain and Jerome K. Jerome contributed to his humorous material; his short stories were drawn from such distant sources as Paul von Heyse, German Nobel Prize Winner and an anonymous contributor to the Christmas Number of the *Humorist* in the middle thirties, from Leonard Merrick to Prem Chand whom he thought no one would have read at that time.

And when in the late thirties he turned his attention to longer fiction, he was mainly concerned with his job of entertainment, though he had by that time shed his character as a humorist and found himself as a writer of versatile talent informing and instructing a larger and larger public among the Tamils. *Kalki's* first novel was *Thiagabhoomi* which appeared as a serial in *Ananda*

*Vikatan*. Meant as a film story, it was illustrated with figures reminiscent of the film. It was a sort of a contemporary political and social tale which is not distinguished by any great truthfulness to life or profundity of theme or passion for reform. It was easy reading; that was all that mattered to the Tamil reader. It dealt with familiar clichés in writing and situation, the London-returned youth and political action in the shape of the Gandhian mass movement which however was not convincingly presented. A few of the incidents in the novel were derived from different sources—like from Lord Lytton and one scene from Cranford but the main theme and action were Kalki's, scarcely memorable or engrossing.

The second novel of Kalki which came soon after because the first novel had really been taken by the readers was a different type of novel—*Kalvanin Kaathali*—the Beloved of the Brigand. Vaguely reminiscent of Robert Maccaire of Reynolds of which two adaptations in Tamil already existed, the story is woven round the life and adventures of a local Robin Hood. This again is an easy-reading tale, with the sentimental over-emphasised and the good very good and the black very black and all an unserious amalgam consistent at no level. The scenes are dished out in a plethora of words—familiar words familiarly dished out. The emphasis is on melodramatic coincidences and climaxes.

It is not necessary that I should detail here all the novels that Kalki wrote for serial publication in his magazines. I have indicated the genius of Kalki in making anything that he wrote racy and interesting and melodramatically ordered. As a culminating masterpiece of this kind in his novelist's career it is enough if I mention his last complete novel in this kind, *Alaiosai*—*The Sound of the Waves* for which Kalki was posthumously awarded a Sahitya Akademi Prize. A long-drawn out melodrama which ranges in time over a few decades of the modern period and geographically over the whole continent of India, it might have been an impressive novel if it had been one fifth its present length of a thousand pages. As it is, it exhausts all the *rasas* in literature and some out of it as well and exhausts also the reader with the steady flow of unmeaning words; no situation or character in the novel emerges into full-bloodedness or convincingness. The story is told with an eye on mystifying the reader in which purpose the author succeeds well. A few of the mysteries



are solved at the end of the novel but quite a few mysteries are left unsolved because of the mere exhaustion of the writer. The writing is racy and at no time does the author want his reader to stop to think of anything that he is offered. Even the events of national importance with which the novel is concerned are treated journalistically and as only of temporary importance. One effect of Kalki's publishing it in his own magazine was that he stopped at many places but for various reasons thought better of it when the next week came and continued; like a conjurer's magic box, the serial is full of false endings and climaxes.

This is only one section of the fictional output of Kalki. He specialised in the writing of 'novellas' and what were called historical novels as well. Between *Thiagabhoomi* and *Alai Osai* he found the need and his own capacity and his readers' universal appreciation of whatever he did. The reader could lap up page after page of melodramatic material. And Kalki decided that he needed a larger scope and canvas, a larger freedom from reality and a greater scope for pageantry. The historical novels gave him all this. Three of his historical melodramas, each one larger than the previous one and were written in this order—*Paarthibhan Kanavu* (The Dream of Paarthibha), *Sivakaamiyin Sabatham* (The Vow of Sivakaami) and *Ponniyin Selvan* (son of the River Cauvery). Many of the scenes and situations in these novels derive and in no distant manner—from scenes and situations in Dumas, Sir Walter Scott, Anthony Hope, Lord Lytton, Charles Kingsley and others; but they are hung round actual persons and incidents which occur in Tamil history. The whole story is marshalled out and told with an eye on melodramatic over-sentimentalised exploitation. Full of mystery, a mysterious person occurs in all these novels and the unravelling of who this mysterious person is one of the strands of interest in the plot; it invariably happens to be a person believed long dead. Cloak and dagger methods and manners accentuate the interest and the passions in the novel. The princesses without exception seem to know *Bharathanatyam* and mix as only socialities of the present century do; they could also at a pinch play on any musical instrument and can fight with swords. There is also a smattering of the quarrels between the religious faiths thrown in for good measure and for the pseudo-profundity it makes possible in the telling.

The impact of the periodical press for which Kalki did all his fiction can be discerned in their common entertainment value as against a lack of seriousness of purpose of writing, in the melodramatic ordering of the material instead of an attempt to give verisimilitude or authenticity, in the raciness and wordiness which replaces the apt word. And again each week has to end on an expectant note; this leads to a sort of crisis in series which crisis comes to nothing because the next week there has to be another crisis. Kalki also made possible even in his historical fiction references to current events and personalities; in a story of the 9th century, the week he was writing about it, there was a storm in Nagapatam and in his novel forthwith Kalki included a storm in Nagapatam which his hero and heroine 'use' in ways of their own; or an elder statesman dies that week and immediately Kalki presses it into his service in the historical novel dealing with the tenth century; he gives us observations of a profound obituary notice-nature in the midst of his story having made a minister or elder statesman of that day die in that instalment.

Kalki's influence on the Tamil novel remains the largest single influence, the dominant factor in Tamil today. The readers of novels written today expect what Kalki gave them and gave them so well-stiff doses of melodrama, a crisis leading to no climax every week, a pace that would carry them onwards without a pause to think, a mysterious something or some one whom they can with safety identify at the end, an interestingness at the cost of verisimilitude, a cliché-ridden familiar phrase or sentiment instead of the right or apt word, and the unfamiliar and the new, an audience-participation which might not in the long run be conducive to creative activity of any merit.

The other side of magazine publication can be seen in two writers of whose novels I shall speak briefly here.

S. V. V. who also started as a humorous writer wrote a number of serials of varying length in the pages of *Ananda Vikatan* at the time that Kalki was feeling his way into the pulse of the Tamil readers. There was a decade in which no week passed without a section of S. V. V.'s serial in the Weekly. In this manner he too was melodramatic and inclined to over-sentimentalise and melodramatise a situation and to write in a general Kalki manner without structural purpose. But his observation of life and character was so shrewd and his sense of character so consummate



that in spite of his slipshod construction and his haphazard ways of writing he managed to produce at least three outstanding novels which should be considered of great literary merit—*Ramamurthi*, *Gopalan I.C.S.* and *Sampath*. Serial publication was responsible for his non-acceptance till today and his major novel *Ramamurthi* has not yet been salvaged from the pages of the magazine in which it was first published.

S. V. V.'s best novels were written in the first half of the forties but another serial writer, Thi Janakiraman towards the closing years of the fifties published his *Moha Mul* as a serial novel in the pages of the *Swadesamitran Weekly*. He has written other serials since but this stands out as his best literary effort—the others being just serial stories of no great merit. Even in this *Moha Mul* (Thorn of Passion) the serial writer seems to have set out with a different purpose from what he finally achieved. The earlier part of the novel deals with a completely different set-up though with the same character; and when the book was published the author had cut off from the final version as many as two hundred pages without harming the second and better part of the novel. Even as it is, the novel suffers from the serial vice of being over-written and running to some eight hundred pages. The other serials of Janakiraman do not have the saving grace of being literary in spite of having been presented as a serial; they have all the qualities of a Kalki serial except that they lack the pace which Kalki could admirably keep up and Janakiraman escapes being as popular as Kalki.

Apart from the three novels of S. V. V. and this one of Thi Janakiraman, there are no exceptions within my reading among the serial publications familiar to the Tamil reader through the medium of the periodical pages. A year produces sometimes as many as twenty novels as serial in one or the other of the magazines and they measure up to the Kalki standards to a certain extent. The serial writer of Tamilnad suffers from a Kalki-complex that seems to ride him in whatever he does; and none of the later writers do measure up to Kalki.

The emergence of the magazine reader in Tamil was largely the work of Kalki as has already been said. Both through *Ananda Vikatan* and through his own *Kalki* he shaped the tastes of the Tamil reader to what they are today; his influence was the largest and most lasting single personal influence in Tamil reading today



influencing the writing at all levels. *Kumudham* came on the scene and began to be effective in a mild sort of way when Kalki was alive but after 1955, *Kumudham* did not modify the influence of Kalki to any great extent.

Many of the readers of these magazines rarely did any other reading. Time was in the thirties when only women read *Ananda Vikatan*; but during the forties and later, men and women, school and college boys and girls began to read *Kalki* and *Kumudham* and *Ananda Vikatan* and magazine-buying has become a habit much like chewing and smoking. The magazine business has exploited the buying habit to its advantage so that Thursday is the day of *Ananda Vikatan* and *Kalki*, Sunday the day of *Kumudham*, Wednesday is the day of *Raani*—the rest of the days of the week being empty. One might be in a hurry to go to office or college but the habit of glancing into the magazines even hurriedly persists. All the symptoms of interest which Dickens' readers in the 19th century displayed in anticipating and realising a Dickens' serial can be said to have their parallel in the expectations and satisfaction that these magazines produce in their readers.

I am instancing all this to show that the serious business of entertaining the Tamil reader is cultivated profitably by these magazines. The reader is not sufficiently educated in matters literary or things artistic though this never occurs to these magazine managements. Saleability and more saleability is their motto; and they often achieve the saleability by lowering the standards of a story or a serial a little at a time. So that since the days of Kalki, in the standards set by Kalki himself, we can perceive a steady deterioration though more persons are writing today at greater profit to themselves.

The magazines pay well for their serial writers. Instances of sub-editors in a particular magazine claiming that their sales went up by twenty thousand copies a week because a serial by so and so was announced for that week are not wanting. One popular writer took delight in telling unbelieving audiences that his readers stood in a Queue when he was writing a serial in such and such magazine for buying the paper; the demand was so great. A writer like Akilan could tell a visiting American Professor that he makes as much as six thousand rupees per year on a serial story for serial publication alone, book right and other rights

being his own. A writer like Saandilyan gets a retainer of five hundred rupees for the month when he is not writing a serial in *Kumudham*—the amount to be adjusted when his next serial appears.

Thirty years of fiction-reading have made the Tamil reader conscious of what he wants from the fiction writers he takes to his heart. Heightened melodrama, a pace that is swift and sweeping, a way of escape from the small worries of his day . . . etc. I have indicated all this when speaking of the work of Kalki. What is more the reader expects his writer to be conscious of what he expects from him; in some cases he insists that he should be allowed the democratic privilege of telling the writers what he should write midway through the story. The reader-writer relationship deteriorates into a sort of fan-mail—‘keep-me-pleased, I shall keep you’ popular sort of attitude. In this predominantly magazine age the writer is forced to seek his reader instead of the normal course of the reader seeking out the writer dear to him. ‘I pay the piper, I can call the tune’ is the attitude that many of these readers have to the fiction they read. And when it is added that the readers of Tamilnad are as a lot unaware that there are standards and uninterested in things not of immediate interest and tend to take overstatement of a lie as a truth, the overportrayal of a sentiment as a genuine feeling or emotion, I think I have said all that need be said on this head. To serve as a corrective there have been practically no little magazines which seem to wither away under the acid breath of finance much more rapidly in India than elsewhere in the world.

In the Tamil literary world since both the reader and the writer are unaware of literary standards and critical criteria and behave as if they would have nothing to do with them for generations to come, it has given rise to a curious position. A serial writer asks in all simplicity and faith—I have written a novel which has been read by thousands of readers every week even though piecemeal; of the thousands who read me at least hundreds write to me appreciating what I have written; is it after all a negligible thing that I have been able to please so many? Why should an author who cannot write a serial, whose stories will not be interesting and cannot be published in a magazine be considered a better writer? ‘I think I am the better writer’, and so on.



He is basing his arguments on something that is non-literary though he is not aware of it. A serial or a novel has to be judged by literary standards as literature; the chances of a novel written piecemeal and applauded by an enthusiastic but undisciplined audience is not likely to be literary at all, unless the author has understood the implications of his having accepted to write a serial novel and has done something to offset it. In cases like S. V. V. and Thi Janakiraman when we see the serial, in spite of being a serial, literary and a novel, it is acknowledged. But Akhilan's and Sandilyan's and Kalki's and a host of the other serial novelists fail to achieve either literary form or content. The public as well as the writer are unconvinced about it, lacking a critical training in literature and literary appreciation. The only way this could be offset apart from insisting on standards and criteria would be to offer the readers in Tamil examples of the novel as practised in the other languages of the world. But the Tamil reader, thanks to Kalki and his magazine efforts, knows what he wants and after the early bout of reading translations from Bengali and Hindi refuses to read any translations at all especially if they were novels.

I do not think that there is a great need to argue the case of a novel published in book form as against a serial novel in monthly or weekly parts. Tillotson's book on the *Novels of the Eighteen Forties* sets out in its *Introductory Chapter* all the arguments for and against.

'Art will not endure piecemeal creation. . . . Novel writing cannot be done in scraps against time. A monstrous anomaly of a twenty month's labour and a piecemeal accouchement'.

Anthony Trollope set against all this the fact that the serial writer could not get away with a set of dull pages though he could not also correct a minor error in the earlier chapters in the light of what had to take place in later chapters. The case of editorial interference in serial-writing is also to be taken into consideration. Dickens who was an ideal serial writer could be very exacting when he was the editor; in 1855 he had particular difficulty with Mrs Gaskell over her *North and South* and is on record as having said; 'If I were only Mr G. Oh, Heavens how I would beat her'. The editor of *Fraser's Magazine* asked Kingsley to shorten



his *Yeast* as some subscribers threatened to withdraw their subscriptions. And Hardy had difficulties when *Tess* was being published as a serial in *Graphic*. In spite of all these we could point to a number of writers of novels of merit whose work first appeared as serials. But such a situation does not prevail in Tamilnad. While we have all the evils of serial publication we have comparatively only a few practitioners of the novel as a serious form.

I have pointed out that conditions in Tamilnad cannot be generalised though all the conditions stem from the popular magazines being what they are and from the direction which Kalki gave to writing fiction in the current period. The magazine fiction of the Tamils both long and short tends to be meretricious and mediocre with no corrective trends visible just now. No kind of fiction that is even remotely experimental or serious and unmelodramatic is possible in Tamil magazines now because the editors demand only the familiar, the escapist and the easy. Publishers also take their cue from these magazines and demand serial stories published first in popular magazines as they think it might be easier to sell; new and unserialised novels get rarely, if at all, published.

### III

I shall in this section offer a few unconnected comments on the fiction world of the Tamils as conditioned by the popular magazines.

The classification of novels among the Tamil readers follows certain set patterns. The social novel deals often at an elementary level of psychological insight with the relations between members of the family, husband and wife, relationships between in-laws; in this division would occur the bigamous (never the polyandrous) intentions of a novelist—a man divided in his marital loyalties; the domestic love novel and the problem novel dealing usually with the problem of widows or harijan welfare. The other major division is the historical novel set in an age which exists only in the imagination of the serial writer though he could quote verse and chapter in his support—verse and text the age of which is by no means certain. The historical novel is as of this date the more favoured of the readers as it makes escape easier and more melodramatic.

The Tamil reader prefers bulk in his novel, a large number of coincidences, a slight philosophical turn of the progressive variety—communist sentiments in Raja Raja Chola's times can be stomached wholesale by him—the heroine in distress in almost every other chapter—though why the heroine alone should be singled out for distress is not plain—and plenty of tear-jerking tricks—these tricks are the better if they are already familiar to the reader. Even if the author should scatter pepper or snuff in his pages the Tamil reader would not object; he so loves to weep. The heroine in any historical novel is an adept at Bharatanatyam—nothing less will do because Kalki made his heroine in one of his most successful novels a dancer. In the social novels the reader dearly loves an ailing wife with a charming sister to whom the husband is making daily love; the reader knows the thing happening while the poor pitiable wife does not; it gives him a thrill. A girl who falls in love with a married author because he writes good novels and stories is also popular with the reader; in three of Akhilan's social novels this happens and that the love is extramarital gives zest to it.

On the credit side of the popular magazines and their impact on the Tamil reader with regard to fiction it has to be said (1) that they have got a larger readership lined up (2) that they have made the language more pliable for all kinds of contemporary usage and (3) that they have fostered an awareness in their readers of what is being done in their language. On the debit side we have to list the fact that this awareness often deteriorates into a sort of jingoism and that the reader is only too conscious of his own rights in respect of the reading material offered to him without being able to correct or offset it with literary discipline or criteria or standards of any kind and that the reader discredits anything that is in any way experimental or new and that he likes to accept once again the accepted and the familiar.

The Tamil insularity which militates against translations especially in fiction from other languages complicates the picture. But we shall have to concede that Tamil fiction especially that serialised in popular journals is free from sex and crime familiar to other languages and other readers except when a serial writer like Sandilyan or Janakiraman for purposes of achieving some popularity writes in a gloating manner over things sexual.

If the popular press could be persuaded to have a critical look at the hundred years of the novel as it has developed in Tamil, we might be able to correct the tendencies in serial fiction today; and a general acceptance of literary standards and critical criteria is of prime importance and a preliminary necessity.

But it will have to be confessed that in spite of the influence of Kalki and the general unawareness of critical criteria of the Tamil reader, the Tamil novel in the past twenty five years has made genuine strides forwards. Ten or twelve novels of excellence and some seven or eight writers of outstanding merit is not a negligible tally in any like period in India or elsewhere.

The major work that remains to be done is to take a critical look at the novel in Tamil as far as it has been affected by the magazines and by the work of Kalki and of the tradition in the literary trend so far established. Any work like this is pioneering work as far as Tamil literature is concerned—Tamil Universities and academicians are afraid for some reasons of their own of a critical look at their literature and I thank the organisers of this Seminar for having given me this occasion to study the literary merits and impact on the reader, of popular fiction in Tamil.



## HOW DEEP IS WESTERN INFLUENCE ON INDIAN WRITERS OF FICTION

K. S. KARANTH

I AM A product of this century and as a writer of a goodly number of novels in the Kannada language, I wish to fathom as to how deep the influence of Western fiction has gone into me and if possible into the works of a few of my contemporaries. I have been deeply impressed by a number of Western writers. I have appreciated them very much too. But it is not the same as saying, that their ways have shaped or reshaped my own choice of subjects, technique, or treatment. In the beginning, let me recount as to what prompted me to write fiction. During my boyhood I had read a lot of fairy tales from the West. But the craze for reading novels came to me from my own language, namely Kannada. These consisted of two sorts—originals and translations. The latter outnumbered the former. One was *Mudramanjusa*, an adaptation from the Sanskrit original, *Mudrarakshasa*. Many were translations of Bankim's novels into Kannada, by B. Venkatachar. Some were translations of Marathi novels, of Hari Narayana Apte. They were mostly romantic types, but were a departure from the very many mythological themes, that we were accustomed to, so long. What caught my fancy was their flamboyant language and pages of high sounding descriptions. The characters were more or less idealised. Sir Walter Scott must have inspired them, I guess, as *Ivanhoe* was my non-detailed text in school. In contrast to these, the originals I read were two novels, one by Gulvadi Venkat Rao and the other by Annaji Rao, both written towards the close of the last century. They were purely social themes dealing with one or two communities of my own district. Hari Narayana Apte's *Pan Lakshanth Kon getho* is a book of this period, but I did not read it then. It is much better than the other two novels. But during those days, our minds were swayed by romantic and sentimental stuff. Till the dawn of the present century, we had little of Kannada prose and very little of fiction. Inspired by Western writers our own people began to write novels of the type I mentioned before and they in turn inspired me to become a writer. During this period

I read quite a number of authors like Jane Austen, Dickens, Victor Hugo, Tolstoy, Kipling and a few others. I liked them much, but must admit, that they failed to shape my own writings. I blasted off a detective novel in the first instance and then turned towards reformistic topics. For, then I was in the non-co-operation movement of Gandhiji, my zeal for social reform knew no bounds and I thought, that I would be blazing a new trail. But books, have to be read before they can effect anybody. I wrote one or two sentimental stories and could not bring out more, for there were no publishers. I thought it better to write dramas and force the unwilling, to listen to my message of social reform. I wrote plays and staged them too. The urge for play-writing and for novels, is not materially different and that is why I mention it now. It was at this period in my life, that I began to read many Western playwrights like Sheridan, Ibsen, Piren-dello, Dunsany, Fletcher, Shaw and others. The variety of problems they handled struck me. The techniques they employed looked so varied and the vigour and clarity of approach they made towards things stunned me. Think of the *Ghosts* by Henrick Ibsen. All this taught me that a novel or a play is something more than sermonising on social problems, as I took them to be. Sentiments were poor substitutes for the understanding of human conflicts and problems. To my good luck the political movement had gained for me my personal freedom from home, even before India gained it. I travelled a lot. My reformist zeal had taken me to the doors of pariahs and prostitutes alike. I gained rich experience in so many walks of life which made me realise that I and my society would be very much better, if I tried to understand life and its problems first, before sermonising. Our very dear sentiments themselves, come in the way of objective perception. If awareness in my own life had not taught me all that, not all the impact of the world would have helped me. It is for this reason I wish to discuss how deep the influence of the West has gone into us. I am considering a few important types of themes, that they and we have handled in common and then, one or two types we have yet to. For instance—the historical novel, the man and woman theme, biographical types etc. Sex is an aspect of life that has dominated the literature of the world, and we too have covered it. Studies on sex behaviour by Havelock Ellis, Malinowski and Mead seem to have provided enough patterns of such



behaviour. But how far have we done justice to these subjects? We claim to write psychoanalytical fiction too, thanks to Freud, Jung and Adler. Some of these themes have been bodily lifted from Western society and the persons concerned given Indian names, or similar situations treated from our own knowledge, or ignorance of psychology.

First, let me make mention of historical novels. At the beginning, I told you of my reading in Kannada, of books like *Chatrapathy Shivaji*, *Anandamata*, *Madhavai karunavilasa* etc. Later writers have given us *Mahabrahmana*, a novel supposedly of the Vedic period; *Shantala*, a novel of the Hoyasala times and a few others. I too might have dabbled in such attempts, had I not come across a few mighty pieces of writing. One such work is by Eugene Sue the author of *Jew Suss*. He has written about the entire history of the exploitation of man by man, through the ages, in a novel running in to twenty volumes. It had been prescribed for long in England. A friend lent me the volumes. Herein the author narrates the history of the times, wedded into the history of two families in Europe, from century to century. The first part deals with the invasion of Gaul by Romans. The last ends with the French revolution. As we proceed through each part, we are made to feel the different times as well as people. Colour, life and culture of each participating group of mankind, vividly described making us feel the History of those peoples.

There is another recent book named *Hawaii*. It takes us through the history of the Hawaiian islands from the days it was peopled by the South Sea islanders till the present day, when the United States dominates the scene. The racial and cultural conflicts of various persons, who peopled these sunny isles are set against the very nature of that country. Polynesian beliefs, Japanese manners and customs, the Christian missionary's zeal to salvage mankind according to his notions of vice and virtue, come into the maelstrom. Then, there are the economic conflicts and political ones that dominate the scene. Leprosy, surf-riding and sex-abandon also play their part in the story.

I cite these two novels as examples of such painstaking research in anthropology, archaeology, history etc., that go to make them historical novels. Compare our own products with such attempts! We give names that may find a place in history,



but we can never mark out a group of people, or period, by its distinctive feature . . . for all the details that go to make culture and history have never been studied, before attempting to write, for past records are not there to give us these details. Travellers of our country have written nothing of their own times. We may have to lean heavily on the writings of foreign travellers like—Magesthenes, Fa Hein, Ibn Batuta, Marcopolo and others. They might have looked through their coloured glasses. And we? Even our museums have little to show by way of details of history, like costumes, ornaments, household articles etc., displayed for ethnological study, as the West has done. With the lack of such visual details, attempting to picture the past history of a period or of people may mean only guess-work. We may get the hang of an ancient story which will be a skeleton to which flesh and blood has to be added. Even our epics like *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharatha* have failed us in that respect. Archaeology has justified much of what Homer said in his *Iliad*. He lived nearer his period. The further we live away from it, the more arduous the task. A mere story is not enough to make a historical novel.

The history of an individual can give us material for a novel too. Novels like *Moon and Six-pence* (Somerset Maugham), *Moulin Rouge*, *Lust for Life* are such studies. Artists being colourful or impetuous personalities become quite handy. In *Moon and Six-pence*, the tumultuous life of Paul Gauguin is pictured. He goes from civilization to a primitive way. In *Moulin Rouge* the life of Tulhaus Lautrec is given and in *Lust for Life* Irving Stone gives us the life of Van Gogh. All these three painters were highly emotional eccentrics. They are placed in a social environment, that we Indians cannot easily conceive. They explode often and their art, is as explosive as they. Every attempt is made to understand these eccentric personalities, now considered as geniuses, but when they lived in flesh and blood, as mere crazy people. Both the art of painting and the artists get a square deal, in the hands of Somerset Maugham and Irving Stone.

On the other hand, we have in Kannada a few such novels too, in the sense, they depict the lives of some artists. Mr Masti's *Subbanna*, Krishna Rao's *Sandhya Raga* and my own *Mogapadedamana* are examples. Our writings are not biographical

in nature but deal with imaginary artists, we deriving our inspirations from living ones. But the main difference is this: Geniuses like Tulhuase or Van Gogh are not before us. Such explosive characters are not our heroes and our own understanding of the particular artistic medium is not as rich. The social background in which our idealised characters live is not as tumultuous. Our vocabulary itself is feeble. Words to conjure up visions of the reactions of sound in music and colours in painting are lacking. They are lacking for the very reason that we have not lived enough through the varied vistas of creative music and painting. When it comes to describing music, a few superlatives, tagged on to the names of 'ragas' and 'talas', is all that we have. Take for example the musical reviews that appear in our newspapers. We can easily perceive the poverty of feeling and expression in them.

Now let me come to novels that deal with sex. *Sringara* has figured a lot in our literature and sculpture too. Vatsayana has given us pictures of sex fantasies. Our authors mostly deal with domestic unhappiness, sex triangles or quadrangles. Though man-and-man or homosexual love has not figured much in our themes, hetrosexual love has been presented in various combinations. We all know that sex can highly cloud our life. It can create innumerable types of conflicts. These conflicts, in the main, can look alike to us and the Westerners. But are they really so? Western society has undergone a vast change, from the mute stage or prudery to open thinking on the subject. With the industrialisation of society, old social structures have broken down. New classes have come into existence. The woman has begun to assert her independence. All this is slowly creeping into our society too. Many a Western writer has written about the conflicts of sex relationship from various angles. Quite a number of others have used the topic, to simply tickle the minds of their readers, and our writers too have begun to do it. Some of our writers claim the credit of psychoanalysis, too.

But is our background the same as theirs? They are not the same. On the one hand, sex is what it is intended to be by Mother Nature. As against this, human society has imposed numerous taboos of its own in order to regulate it. These man-made inhibitions are different in different societies and different in



different times. On them are based the moral aspects of the question. Sciences like psychology, have shed new light on its nature. Anthropology has given varied pictures of it. We Indians, while claiming to write about sex themes, are not so explicit when dealing with such things, lest a part of our being should reveal itself. Our minds have longings like anyone else in the West. Our moral codes are based on outworn conditions of social settings, and our actual lives are covered by secrecy. With this background of ours, we create ideals out of sheer sentiment. We never bother about the true nature of the problems involved. Before we understand the problem of sex, we begin to write about it, according to what we like or dislike. •

The West had made us bold to take up such themes in our novels. Success achieved by authors like Alberto Moravia and others may inspire us to write, but for want of a free-thinking mind, on a gravely provocative subject, we often fumble. Since our own society is in such a predicament, its actual behaviour and conscience compartmentalised, conversation on the nature of the sex-problem can be misunderstood or ridiculed. Borrowing such themes will be of little help to us. We must have a deeper insight into the subject. A study of the actual background, in which a particular sex conflict takes place, is what is lacking in most of our writings. We seem to be more concerned with the spiciness of it, than with the human conflict. It has to be human before it can be a moral issue, for we as well as the reader, are too deeply involved in it.

Imaginative and speculative type of fiction is one towards which the West has contributed a lot, say for instance, the detective story. Sir Arthur Connon Doyle set the ball rolling. We have now many more such writers. In my own boyhood, I was tempted to write one or two, inspired by the Bengali version of the novel *Parimala*. Now, there are hundreds of such books in Kannada. But what of the quality? Without a fairly good understanding of the criminal nature in man, without enough knowledge of criminology as such, and without the understanding of ballistics and science of detection, our writers write stories of crime and detection. There is little mystery or detection in them. They look childish in comparison with what we are accustomed to get from the West.



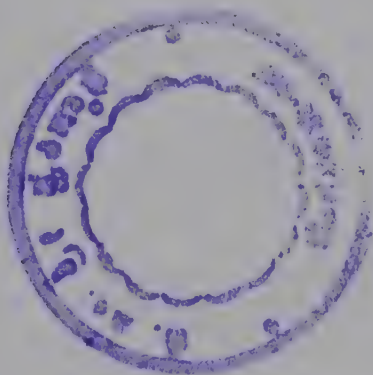
Now, think of scientific fiction. Jules Verne was one of the early pioneers who gave us such type of fiction. Authors like H. G. Wells have tried to probe into the future. People like Isaac Assimov have given us stories that almost predict the future more scientifically than even Wells has done in his *Shape of Things to Come*. Since I have read quite a number of articles by both Wells and Assimov, I feel they do excel in such creative fancies. Where among us can we find writers who are versed fairly well in the various branches of science? Most of our literary figures are graduates of arts. I am not even one such. Hence we find this interesting field is barren. In a way it is good that we don't make fools of ourselves like the detective story-writers of our language.

But quite a number of speculative and intellectual things are within our reach, if only we cultivate them. I am thinking of novels of new ideas, the possibility of a new society that can come to existence, if social conditions were a bit different. (Aldous Huxley has done it). Our thinking can drive us to examine afresh many a fondly expressed sentiment of ours towards right and wrong. Many of our expected norms of social conduct are not the whole truths. They are sometimes self-contradictory and many a time only part-truths that turn a blind eye towards reality. For example, many a writer in India takes for granted that the rich are vile and the poor are divine, but yet we don't want poverty and so we turn towards Engels and Karl Marx. From them sprang the idea of the glory of the working class. To say that the worker must get his due is something different from the assertion that it is man's muscle that creates wealth of all sorts. According to that notion the proletariat alone is entitled to rule the world. What is meant is perhaps the clever should rule behind the protective shield of the working mass or class. Such an idea is challenged by a woman writer like Ayn Rand in a bulky novel named *Atlas Shrugged*. She came from the U.S.S.R. and we can well understand her revolt. All may not like her championing the cause of brain against brawn. What I admire is the masterly process of thinking and rationalisation with which she presents to us her case through a thousand pages of her novel. Such a challenge is bound to come one day or the other, in future.

Our literature is singularly lacking in books of this type. But why? I feel that it is so for the simple reason that our writers

are not much of thinkers. They are more wedded to sentiment. They may switch from one sentiment to another, but rarely sit down to examine the already accepted values of life. We should develop an objective appraisal of our experiences and that of others we come across. But subjectively, our mind must be able to scan them and probe into them. To be an impartial judge of things, one has to tax one's intelligence.

Now I come to the end of my paper and probably, of your patience too. If I am to raise the same question that I began at the start, the answer would be: We all use chronometers manufactured by the Swiss. But in daily life, so far as keeping our engagements is concerned, the same is but an ornament.



## THE IMPACT OF THE WEST ON TRADITIONAL VALUE PATTERNS

BUCHI BABU

WE are observing the birth centenary of Lala Lajpatrai, one of our great Freedom fighters. Having spent my boyhood in the peace and quiet of the countryside, while I loved the word 'Freedom', I dreaded the word 'Fight'. It evoked visions of bloodshed, massacre and revolution of ferocious warriors and cruel tyrants in history. At that time I was not prepared to associate virtues like wisdom, charity and gentleness with the fighter. But later when I began to know more of the men who brought me freedom, through their autobiographical writings, I found that they were noted for their gentleness, charity and kindness and Lala Lajpatrai, the gentlest and most generous of men. In his autobiography, I came across a touching reference to his mother's belief in astrology. This is the passage:

'I owe a great deal to my mother who gave me constant lessons in charity, generosity and hospitality. Looking back to my childhood it gives me great pleasure to remember how my good mother felt delighted whenever an astrologer could tell her that her son would be charitably disposed'.

Mark the words: She felt delighted to know that her son would be charitably disposed. Three decades ago a mother would have been delighted to know that her son would get into the I.C.S., and perhaps the mother of tomorrow would be pleased to learn that her son would become a film star or a minister. This passage I think puts the changes that have come over our traditional value patterns in proper perspective.

From charity fifty years ago, we have arrived at the challenge of today. There may have been a shift of interest from Astrology to Astronomy but the basic pattern has remained unaltered. The intellectual today may be convinced that the distant stars do not influence the destiny of humans—nonetheless he likes to consult the astrologer. No marriage is celebrated without the assurance that the horoscopes of the bride and groom are in agreement. The rationalist still fears the evil eye; the sceptic



still avoids to meet a cat when he steps out. But these are familiar to all of us and in this paper I propose to describe some changes in the traditional value patterns resulting from the impact of Western thought—changes I have known in my own life during the last twentyfive years of my writing career, changes that have been recorded in my own writing and in that of my fellow writers.

The first on my list of changes in the traditional value patterns is worship of money. Preoccupation with the life beyond and the contemplative habit of mind, the purposive mode of discharging one's duty without concern for its fruits, the spirit of renunciation and the meditative act to end the cycle of birth by merging in the Absolute—these constituted the foundation of the traditional conduct of life and beyond the need to secure the minimum wants to keep oneself alive, money finds no place in the scheme. My great grandfather, I was told, never saw money in his life; my grandfather could hardly sign his name and with a monthly income of eight rupees, managed among other things, to build a house and buy a few acres of land, the fruits of which I still enjoy. My father retired on a pension of fifty rupees, although his income while in active service was augmented by 'mamools'—'inams' and the customary gifts—being one of the legacies of the British Raj. During those days, the dream of a young man was to obtain some kind of degree and join as a clerk in a Government office. He was told by the elders—in a whisper—that he could make a lot of money by other means. The fight against this custom has today crystallised into a nation-wide anti-corruption drive. Nearly twenty years ago I began my life as a tutor in a College English Department on a monthly salary of forty rupees. At that time, I was contented; but I was dismayed when I learnt that the chauffeur of my English Professor was getting twice my salary. Here I was, a young man from a respected Brahmin family of the prosperous Godavary District, a Master of Arts of the Madras University, getting only forty rupees; while the chauffeur . . . well—well—the train of thought need not be pursued. There is something basically wrong in the system. I thought of this for a day or two and invoking the democratic ideal I got reconciled to it. What really perturbed me came later, when I went home for the vacation. And that was the question everybody whom I met anywhere was asking me—the question 'What is your pay?' A variation of it was 'How much are

you getting?' A year later when I got one increment the question was the same. I gave the same answer. They then asked me 'What is the increment?' Sometime after, I became an assistant lecturer but the interrogators never left me in peace. This time it was 'What are you *now* getting?' No doubt these are well meaning persons, interested in my welfare. But my surprise was that they had no other questions to ask. They certainly could ask me what I thought of the Second World War, the Quit India Movement, of Shakespeare and Kalidasa and a host of other topics on the study of which I spent the best years of my life, and for which my father had to sell away two acres of land.

The adulation of wealth and the wealthy and the importance people attach to money for its own sake is one of the most startling results of the impact of the west. I do not know if this comes from the British rule in India, or from Western culture through its Literature; or from the values unconsciously emulated by English-educated Indians. Well, it is impossible to say, because some of my tormentors had never had any education. But there it was, poisoning the atmosphere. Not that I don't want money. I do want it and thoroughly endorse the dictum of Somerset Maugham that money is the sixth sense, without which you cannot make use of the other five. But in the effort to awaken and cultivate the sixth sense, the other five are starved and destroyed. There is a saying by Bertrand Russell which I love to quote in this context. He says that the stupid are cocksure and the wise are silent and this is one of the maladies of the modern age. And what gives such cocksureness to the stupid is the money they make by dubious means. This type has been effectively exposed by R. K. Narayan in his *The Financial Expert* and *The Man Eater of Malgudi*—the title itself is significant—and by Mulkraj Anand in his *Two Leaves and a Bud*. As every writer should, these writers sought relief from the situation through their writing. For a writer, to write is to act. Perhaps I too did the same. I wrote all this in a story about a young man and his wife who, wearied with answering the question, 'How much do you get' over a number of years,—jotting down with a dot each time the question is put—they at last got to an *ashram*, seeking peace and quiet in the shadow of the holy man, who dwells in it. And what happens there? The holy man has a chat in whispers with



his disciple and the disciple asks the peace-seeking young man 'What are you?' and after this has been answered, puts further a question 'How much do you get?' The young man spends his remaining days in a hut on the banks of a river, growing his own vegetables without caring to earn the proverbial four paise—each pebble representing a rupee in the Telugu idiom.

Religion and ritual is another aspect which has been subjected to a tremendous impact from the West. The rapid rise of industrialism, the spread of rationalist thought, the advances in science and technology and the emergence of the concept of one world and the democratic ideal of respect for individual man—these characterise the modern temper. Diminution of religious faith, the uncertain value of prayer and personal God are not a little owing to the spread of modernism. I do not know if the number of unbelievers is growing faster since the Second World War but the number of agnostics and atheists is indeed very small. The modern experiment to which the intellectual appears committed, is hardly known to the vast numbers in our villages. Let me quote Dr Radhakrishnan:

'When confronted with new cultures or sudden extensions of knowledge, the Indian does not yield to the temptations of the hour but holds fast to his traditional faith, importing as much as possible of the new into the old. This conservative liberalism is the secret of the success of Indian Culture and Civilisation'.

As a writer, I am concerned with what we are importing of the new into the old. Much of what has been going on in this direction, I am afraid is negative in character. One such is the discarding of the holy thread worn at the time of the initiation ceremony. Sometimes after the coming of the 1935 Government of India Act, I remember reading a delightful essay by the Tamil humorist S.V.V. in which the prospective candidate applying for a post reserved for a backward community candidate, sends his holy thread along with the application form. For a few days after the initiation ceremony, I used to recite the ritual prayer but neither I nor my teachers understood its meaning and slowly the practice was falling into disuse and a year or two later, the thread was discarded. My cousins followed suit and any one wearing the thread was considered old-fashioned.



Even my father thought it prudent to let it slip down the waist, where it got tangled up with the waist band woven in saffron-coloured thread. The tuft of hair is a status symbol proclaiming the caste hierarchy and we were all moderns, hungering to bring about a casteless society. But I was unaware of this. I was at that time doing woman's role in college theatricals and so had to shave off my moustache. This was the cue for my cousins to shave off theirs and my father was the last to succumb to the fashion and succumb he did.

On festive occasions, we do have an oil bath, wear new clothes and sit before the idol and perform *pooja*. Those who have no faith in the efficacy of the ritual and those who have hitched their wagon to the star of rationalism observe these festivals, if only to please their wives and elders. And, before and after elections the stream of pilgrims to the shrine at Tirupathi grows in volume. What I am trying to say is that the outward forms of the religious spirit are manifest everywhere but whether this attitude springs from any firm inner conviction, any genuine urge to know and seek the absolute is another matter. Let me quote Russell again. He says 'It is not by prayer and humility that you cause things to go as you wish but by acquiring a knowledge of natural laws' and again,

'The power of prayer had recognised limits; it would have been impious to ask too much. But the power of Science has no known limits. We were told that faith could remove mountains but no one believed it; we are now told that the atomic bomb can remove mountains and everyone believes it'.

But even in the West prayers are offered so that their side might win in time of war and in time of peace that the atomic bomb may speedily and successfully remove mountains. It is this equating of the practical answer to prayer with the spiritual urge for beatitude that is tantalising and its depiction in modern fiction is equally so. This confusion has been neatly analysed by Meister Eckhart. Expounding the mystic path, he says:

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. More blessed are those who hunger and thirst after the presence of God. But most blessed are those who having

attained the Eternal now, hunger and thirst after nothing at all'.

But today we seem to be more concerned with the attainment of the Eternal Now and take for granted that our inner development has been completed long ago for us by our elders. There is a fine passage in Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography* which is relevant here. He says:

'It is a common place that in the modern industrial West outward development has far outstripped the inner, but it does not follow, as many people in the East appear to imagine that because we are industrially backward and our external development has been slow, our inner development has been greater. This is one of the delusions with which we try to comfort ourselves and try to overcome our feeling of inferiority. A man who is the victim of economic circumstances and who is hedged and restricted by a struggle to live can very rarely achieve inner consciousness of a high degree'.

This inner consciousness, according to Dr Radhakrishnan, is the ethical basis which has helped Hindu religion with all its weakness to endure to long. Side by side with its insistence on the outer there was also the emphasis on inner purity. Then follow a list of essentials of a good life.

'Truth, Godliness, honour to parents, kindness to animals, love of man, abstinence from theft, murder and adultery were inculcated as the essentials of a good life'.

I shall now touch briefly on each of these essentials in so far as they find expression in modern writing. I think the writer today is engaged in creating a climate necessary for the apprehension of truth. The characters in the novel and in the short story show a habit of basing their beliefs upon observations and influences as impersonal and divested of temperamental bias as is possible in their milieu. But the milieu itself has become a battle ground of conflicting ideologies. Excessive nationalism has led to war; and those countries like India, which value peace and strive for the brotherhood of man eschewing combative instincts are compelled to strike the militant attitude in the face of unprovoked aggression. Race, language and religion have



engendered fanaticism, strife and conflict. Men like Maurice Audin, Ashton Jones, Agostinho Neto, Patrick Duncan who believed in equality between the 'white' and the 'coloured' races have been persecuted and many whose ideals are in conflict with those that are in power are suffering for their ideals. As Nehru says 'Evidently Governments do not like people who are always trying to find out things; they do not like the search for truth'. One result of this is, the writer is becoming increasingly aware of the futility of following or imitating the western literary models in form or in content. There is no doubt an element of universality in all great works and they are the heritage of mankind. But the writer is rightly preoccupied with the problems of his people and his immediate environment. Above all the writer is discovering himself through his writing. The Telugu novel *Malapalli* depicts the suffering of a backward community and it pulsates with a passion for justice and equality, appealing for their regeneration in the heart of man and not merely in the sphere of legislative action. On a humbler plane, there is an anxiety to give up superstition and obscurantist practices. There is a custom which may be called 'the lady of the house is unwell' for three days in the month, when she has to stay alone aloof from company. This was there twenty years ago and even today it is observed in orthodox families in villages. I wrote of this in my novel *All that Remains*. A young man wants his distant relation, a married woman to go with him on a picnic. She tells him, she is unwell, and he does not understand and taunts her standoffish attitude. So as not to offend him she flouts the convention, tells no one about it and goes on the picnic. She is not an educated woman, that is, she had not been to any school or college; even so, she keeps breaking the traditional code of conduct unconsciously just out of innate goodness of heart. The impulse here is to show the full and free flowering of personality, the gradual awakening of the spirit of freedom, the joy of living and the rich manifestation of life. The development of this consciousness is now seen in the fact that we have many women novelists, and in their writings they are discovering their possibilities towards sentiment, feeling, sensibility and a new dimension of their being; their eagerness to participate in all the arts, which had all along been the province of man. And these women writers know where to stop. Perhaps their restraint and sobriety are their



chief merit. In a popular novel by Kausalya Devi—*The Wheel Comes full Circle*—the heroine is a musician and writer and is greatly admired by a friend of her husband. Friendship develops between the two and when tongues start wagging about their intimacy, it turns out that the admirer likes her because she reminds him of his sister who died young. If nothing is the matter between him, why write about them? One would have thought that a problem arises only when the two who are already married, are in love with each other. Evidently, the writer is not interested in this problem. Her interest is to show that men should be tolerant to woman's full and active participation in the social and cultural life along with men on a footing of equality, an adulation of the emancipated woman. The book is a plea for cultivating moral integrity and the moral law is binding not merely on women but on men and women alike; and man should not claim the right to indulge in sexual irregularities while outwardly professing moral idealism. This is a point of view which is not freely discussed in the writings by men. As Russell has said, it looks as though we have two kinds of morality side by side, one which we preach but do not practise; the other which we practise but do not preach.

Professor D. S. Sarma, author of many critiques on the *Gita*, in his autobiographical work *From Literature to Religion* recalls how Mr Candeth, the then Deputy Director of Education, offered to take him into the Indian Educational Service, if only he had worn trousers instead of *dhoti* and adds the comment: 'On the same principle professors of Sanskrit in British and German Universities should be wearing *dhotis* and should have sat at the feet of the pundits in India. Max Muller had not even visited India'.

The second in the list of essentials of Good life is Godliness on which I had touched a little earlier. Today an attempt is being made to wean the younger generation to the religious ideal by dressing up the ancient classics in modern garb. Today in Andhra at any rate, we have the *burra-katha*—the heroic, popular ballad—pressed into the service of *Gita*. I am not happy about this and I agree with T. S. Eliot when he says that the young are more likely to take to religion when it is difficult than when it is made easy. Our fiction depicts the predicament of man in the society which he has made and the level of appeal is still to the

material, the physical well-being, whereas drama particularly tries to show up the struggle brought about by economic inequalities. Here again the emphasis is on types and representative characters and not on individuals. The man who rose to a position of power with unearned income or with profits made by black-marketing and other dubious means is depicted as a blackguard, a cruel tyrant out to destroy gentleness, goodness and youthful idealism. He is the thief that goes unpunished, who is placed in positions of power and authority; if he recites the *Gita* and goes on a pilgrimage, he is dubbed a hypocrite; he is held up to ridicule and in some plays he is killed. In a story by Gerard De Nerval the judge decrees that the arm of the thief be cut off—and the amputated arm strangles the judge. Psychologists tell us that modern man has inherited from primitive man in his hunting stage from the collective unconscious certain warlike and combative impulses and that in the modern age there is no outlet for the streak of ferocity; the sense of glory is possible only to men in power, athletes and film stars. The inference is that modern man welcomes war for any cause, as an outlet for self-glorification. Three or four years ago, I read in the papers that up in the North a bank clerk embezzled bank money and in order to escape the shame of exposure he made a pyre of rupee notes, and committed suicide by falling on it and in the note he left he said 'I wanted to die in glory'. I wonder if the reader would accept it as credible if I used this incident in a story. The sense of glory possible to men and women of yester year who had perfectly adjusted themselves to the traditional pattern of society is most ably pictured by Viswanatha Satyanarayana in his major novels.

The new-found sense of freedom, the feeling of exhilaration and the search for excitement and amusement which we find in the younger generation and the untutored masses in the villages—all these seek some kind of relief through the mass media of entertainment, from what Priestley calls 'Admass', especially the cinema. Reverance for parents and teachers is another traditional value which is now disappearing, and the conflict between the young and the old is a favourite theme of the modern novelist. The choice of a profession, or a bride, the unwillingness to share his income with the members of the family or to go one's own way—usually these are the grounds of conflict, best summed up in the aphorism, 'the first half of our life is ruined by our parents



and the second half by our children'. As for the teacher, the attitude of the student to his teacher is expressed in the cruel witticism that the only time a teacher does good to his students is when he dies, because then a holiday is declared.

I now come to the concept of love of man. When I was a boy, I attended a marriage. All of us were taking food inside a thatched enclosure. It was midday and a fierce sun was breaking through the holes in the thatch. While our meal was in progress, a milk bearer by mistake pushed aside the gate and walked inside the enclosure. There were angry cries and the orthodox who felt polluted walked out. Similarly, later in my life after obtaining M.A. Degree I applied for a teaching post in a college in the Ceded Districts. It was given to me on the distinct understanding that if a qualified candidate from the Ceded Districts applied for the post I should be ready to vacate. I happened to hail from the coastal districts and my idealism was rudely shocked. I made use of these incidents in my novel with a view to exploring the causes that divide man from man.

In my younger days there was a general feeling of dislike towards the Tamils who, it was said, held all the plums of office in Andhra. With the formation of Andhra Pradesh, I think this feeling had abated. Today we talk of breaking down the barriers of caste and community but I wonder if this has been wholly achieved in actual conduct. I am not talking about the ordered socialistic pattern of society brought about by legislative measures. In stories and novels, we read of inter-caste marriages and writers are anxious to explore the inner recesses of feelings of hate and love and are creating a climate for translating the idea into a reality. Sivasankar Pillai's stories depict the fundamental oneness of man when exposed to the fury of nature. Padmaraju in his prize winning story 'The Cyclone' reveals how the humanity of man is affirmed breaking down the walls erected by caste and economic factors—the story in which the sophisticated, well-to-do, respectable man seeks security, warmth and solace in the arms of a beggar woman when caught up in a cyclone. The cult of the individual has led to the break-up of the joint family and this aspect is depicted in the writings of Tara Sankar Banerjee. I have known brothers quarrelling in an undivided family, evincing more brotherly affection after division of family fortunes. But it is not



for me to say whether this break-up is desirable or not; but I only wish to say that this has resulted from the impact of the West.

A word or two about love and marriage, and the status of women in contemporary society. In my younger days, it was fashionable to castigate an educated woman and the stigma of immorality was attached to women in office. Today all this has changed. We are respecting the educated woman and we admire the woman who attains economic independence. Even so in modern writing an educated woman finds it difficult to get married, because the not-so-well educated men feel intellectual inferiority and when the woman is past twenty-five, they doubt her character. Another factor is that the woman today has awakened to a sense of her power and potentialities and her search for freedom sometimes makes her over-step the conventional moral bounds in competition with man and she is out to expose the moral pretentiousness of man. The writings of Lawrence, Ibsen and Shaw have emboldened the Telugu writer who does not fight shy of tweaking the nose of the pompous and the humbug. The writer who strove most in this sphere is of course Venkatachalam. The story I like best is 'Abhinava Sarangadhara'. We all know the story of Sarangadhara. In a small village there is a young man who does not succumb to the wily overtures and advances of his step-mother and this earns a reputation for moral integrity and idealism and even people in distant places refer to him as modern Sarangadhara. He is on the look-out for a job. At last he gets a call from Madras. He goes there and is received by his prospective employer and is led to a large bungalow. He is given excellent food and gorgeous clothing and relaxes alone in a large hall. Then a lady decked in finery accosts him and soon starts making love to him. He resists at first, but presently he tells himself, that he is far away from his friends and relations and no body would know whatever he does in this remote place. Having satisfied his conscience, he begins to reciprocate her advance when suddenly from behind the curtains come out the film director the camera-man and technicians. They take the young man to task for spoiling the film of 'Sarangadhara' which they are shooting with the hero from real life in the role of Sarangadhara—. As regards the ideal of monogamy in the West they say the chain of wedlock is so heavy that it takes two to carry it and sometimes three. Even so, in modern fiction the idealisation of marriage

has not been flouted. I read in Lala Lajpatrai's autobiographical writings that what interested him most during his stay in California was M. N. Roy's falling in love with an American girl who despite parental opposition decided to marry him. Recalling this incident Lajpatrai writes 'The Hindu boys in New York were disposed to consider Roy as a traitor to the cause in so far he had fallen in love with this girl. Most of them insulted the girl. I opened my rooms to them and began to exchange visits'. That was fifty years ago and even today the life of a man who marries for love outside his community is no easy one and no picture of his life in fiction ever satisfies the modern novelist who indulges in motiveless jeering. J. B. Priestley has a powerful fling at these novelists:

'They will jeer at you if you are married, and sneer at you if you are unmarried; they will curse you for a clumsy swindler if you are in business or politics or a profession and set you as a neurotic weakling if you are an artist; they will dismiss you with a bitter paragraph if you attempt suicide and yet raise their eyebrows through twenty-five chapters if you persist in living'.

So the emphasis has now shifted to rehabilitating the fallen woman. And in the early writings of Masti, we note the writer's pre-occupation with their lot. You remember Goldsmith's poem:

When lovely woman stoops to folly  
And finds too late that men betray  
What charm can smooth her melancholy  
What art can wash her guilt away?

The answer to this was that she has to commit suicide. The modern answer to this has been given in T. S. Eliot's parody of these stanzas. The modern woman in such a plight will 'smooth her hair with an automatic hand and puts a record on the gramophone.'

Let us see how this Western impact has affected the contemporary writer. Many people consider the Western impact harmful and as the contemporary writer is alleged to be imitating the Western models, his writing too is considered flippant and harmful, being outside the tradition of ancient classics. It is

assumed that the writer's popularity derives from certain cheap, vulgar elements bordering on pornography. The writer of fiction uses the spoken language and his work is thus further removed from the aesthetics associated with the sublimity of the classic literary diction. The story writer, like the stage actor, finds himself outside the pale of respectable society, awaiting to be resuscitated by the Sahitya Academy. The state of our respect for culture has been finely described by R. K. Narayan in his essay 'A Library without books'. The sponsors of a Library building insist that the building should be ready by the tenth of the month. When asked why this firm date, the man in charge, replies 'Otherwise it will be no use for us. Sri . . . So and so . . . will be passing this way, on the tenth and he has agreed to perform the opening ceremony. If the building is not in our hands on that date it will be practically useless for us afterwards'. And so the question, 'How are you going to select the volumes?' the answer is: 'We shall first measure the total shelf space, get an approximate idea of the number of volumes required to fill them, and call for quotations for the supply of this quantity'. But the writer's integrity is more important and should not be sacrificed for the sake of social recognition. This is a problem for all writers of fiction the world over. J. B. Priestley bemoans that the writer is being elbowed out in the West. T. S. Eliot narrates how a French Cultural Society invited him to address its members and how when he wrote to say that he was on the horns of a dilemma as regards the choice of subject, the society promptly printed handbills saying that Eliot will speak on the horns of a dilemma. The Telugu poet Sri Sri stood for election and lost—all this is part of the predicament of the modern writer and perhaps his awareness of the predicament will sharpen his sensibilities and hasten the process of exploring his imaginative depth.



# TRANSLATION OF INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

*(With special reference to Hindi)*

PRABHAKAR MACHWE

WHILE teaching a course on 'Modern Indian Literature' for four semesters in a mid-western University in the States, several questions arose within me, which could be roughly framed thus: What relevance and value does Indian fiction have to a non-Indian audience? From whatever little is available in translation, and that too not all of an equal standard, the English knowing world gathers a very vague and partial idea about Indian fiction. Nearer home, what exactly is 'Indian' in the fiction written in several Indian languages? Does a novel in one Indian language have the same appeal in another? Are the culture patterns and belief patterns in different linguistic states comparable or interchangeable? Can we allow the western reader to remain satisfied and confined to whatever Indians write in English? Is there no danger in permitting the wide world to stand 'face to face' only with persons who have been 'too long in the west'? Mental and Physical expatriates, venting their ire and cynicism in English are hardly the right type of guides to the soul of Indian literature. Ved Mehtas and Naipauls and Nirad Chaudharis are surely not the only Indians the English knowing world should rely upon to understand India.

So the dilemma is twofold: There are not many good translations of the rich and variegated fare available in Indian languages; and if one depends only on what Indians write in English, sometimes it may mislead. This paper which is written with a desire to explore the possibility of culling and arranging some readable materials in English does not claim any exhaustive or perfectionist approach. A select bibliography at the end will reveal that it is merely a personal and individual choice—and all literature, in the ultimate analysis, is nothing more than a matter of enlightened taste, there being no finality about any judgement, anyway. I confine myself to the translation of fiction from Hindi into English, for a more detailed enquiry.

Though the first novel in Hindi was written in 1843, the early novels were mostly a mixture of the medieval folk tale or '*Quissā*' and a pale copy of western novels translated into Bengali or Urdu. Dickens and Scott, Raynolds and Thackeray were the models till the turn of the century. Fiction worth mentioning in the modern sense came to stay in Hindi with Premchand (1880-1936). He was born in a village named Lamahi near Banaras in U.P.; his original name was Dhanpatrāi Shrivastāva, but he adapted a pseudonym, for Urdu, Nawāb Rai, and Premchand for Hindi. He started writing novels in 1901, his collection of short stories in Urdu, entitled '*Sos.e-Vatan*' (Sorrows of a nation) was proscribed in 1910 by the British Government. He started writing in Hindi in the Twenties. He has written 12 novels and 300 short stories. The last significant novel was '*Go.dān*', which is translated in almost all Indian languages and several languages in the world. It is also filmed. I am going to discuss in this paper its translation by Jai Ratan and P. Lal (Published by Jaico).

After Premchand's death several novelists in Hindi made their mark; four amongst them can be picked up as the most important living writers: Jainendra Kumar (b. 1905— ); S. H. Vatsayan (b. 1911— ); Bhagavati Charan Varma (b. 1903— ) and Yashpal (b. 1903— ). Unfortunately I could not lay my hands on any English translation published in book form of Vatsayan or Yashpal. I take Bhagavati Charan Varma's novel *Chitrlekha*, which has been published in 20 editions (nearly a lakh copies) within the last 30 years. Its English translation is by Chandra Karki and published by Jaico. I also refer to Jainendra Kumar's famous novel '*Tyāgapatra*' (*The Resignation*, by S. H. Vatsayan and published by Siddharth Publications), which is translated in German and Serbo-Cwatan also.

But all this work is by writers who are now in their fifties and sixties. Amongst the younger Hindi writers of fiction, though no one name can be mentioned to match these old masters', yet two novels deserve mention, as they are also available in English translation. One is Krishna Baldev Vaid's '*Uskā Bachpan*', translated by the author and published in the States as *Steps in Darkness* the other is Anant Gopal Shevade's '*Jwalamukhi*', translated by the author and published in the States as *The Volcano*. One experimental novel, satirical and anti-romantic,



by Dharmavir Bharati, entitled in Hindi *Suraj Ka Sataran Ghorhā*, was translated by Vatsayan and serialized in *Thought* as '*Seventh Horse of the Sun*'.

These six or seven titles cannot be said to exhaust the world of Hindi fiction, wherein at least a hundred novels per year are being published. Yet for the sake of this enquiry, I shall confine mainly to the three translations at hand. Through these enquiries some questions relevant to the problems of translation from Indian languages into English will arise; and I am certain that neither you nor I have all the answers.

I begin with a bad translation—*Chitrlekha*. I call it bad as it does not convey the spirit of the original, reads staccato in English and it is a good example of one who is using English not as a living language, but merely as bookish language, learnt at a third remove. This novel begins with the paragraph:

Shvetanka ejaculated, 'And sin?'

Mahaprabhu Ratnambar was startled from a profound reverie, and appeared to recollect himself after a spell of mind-wandering. He looked full into the face of the youth. 'Sin! you have put a difficult question, my child. But I confess it's logical enough'. Thereupon he looked for some time in the direction of the tumultuous Pataliputra, whose high soaring places were still visible in the twilight of the fallen day. 'Hm, I too have tried to define sin many a time, but to no avail', he said. 'What's sin, what's virtue, where they live, well, all too puzzling for mind and beyond definition in words. I myself have endeavoured a good many years, yet I seem to find vice and virtue as evasive as ever. How can one unfold the secret of this strange human experience, which has since the ancient times baffled great sages, let alone a man like me, who has nothing but a bit of experience to boast of'.

In the 'Introduction', the translator says—'I trust that this English translation will be able to evoke the interest of a large body of readers. There occur in the translation some infinitely technical words of Hindu philosophy, like *Brahman* and *Maya*, *Sanyasi* and *yogi* etc. etc. These words are in a way personal to Hindu philosophical thought and it is difficult to find their precise equivalents in English, while their expression in diffused words in English may also not make good reading. I, therefore, hope that as these Hindi (Sanskrit) words have found vogue in a



number of English books written by both Western and Indian authors, they will present no difficulty to the readers'.

I hear that this translation published in paper back in 1957 is no more available and it might have interested a large body of readers. But such a translation suddenly raises three questions: For whom is this translation? Who does it? And how is it done?

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Obviously, this work is not meant for the Western reader. Apart from the fact that such English in fiction will just not be tolerated by the English speaking reader, it may also antagonize him from reading any further translations from Hindi. If it is meant for the Indian readers, it is not for the Hindi speaking people as they have read the original and will not derive one-tenth of the pleasure of the original Sanskrit prose-poetic style. Moreover, the translation is not even faithful to the original, the translator has taken liberties wherever and whenever he likes, probably the translator has not followed the undertones and shades of meaning at places. So the paramount question in such cases is whether collaboration with or no approval of the original author, who may be presumably knowing English, not necessary? In case such collaboration is not available, is it not necessary in fairness to a language or literature to refer the manuscript to some language-expert and get it edited?

The question of retaining the style, in the case of historical or mythological novel or a period-novel is very relevant. How far can the original be maintained? Is the translation to be loaded with footnotes or appendices, or is the original to be sacrificed? Wherever a literal rendering is boring, to what extent can the translator take liberties is another moot question. I have heard that many translations done by Indians are rejected by Western publishers simply because their readers do not approve our style and diction. It is not 'Indian' English, like Indian handicrafts or brassware that would be sold. They say—it will have to be English first, Indianness or otherwise is a secondary consideration.

*Chitrlekha* has been filmed twice, that too badly. But it has been a tremendous commercial success for the author. He has named his mansion in Lucknow after that novel. But originally inspired by Anatole France's 'Thais', this novel does succeed to a limited degree in creating an atmosphere of the Gupta age,

when Buddhism and Phenomenalistic hedonism was at its height. The novel is centred round the problem of self-restraint and celibacy *vis-à-vis* vivacious but pensive dancing girl. That all values are relative is what the novel concludes with, and wants to establish man as the measure of all things. It is neither deep nor philosophical; but a popular novel in Hindi no doubt. The author has a verve for story-telling and a sense of robust wit. I wonder if this novel could ever catch the eye of a modern western reader, who has read the fictionalized discussion on the problem of sin in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Resurrection* and *The Outsider*.

*Godan*, is a better translation and a more moving and human document of the life story of a poor peasant, fatalistic and resigned, all very true to life. An excellent piece of a documentary narrative, having Gorky-like voucher of social realism. Premchand is a typical example of our young idealist in the thirties, torn between the opposite pulls of Gandhism and Socialism. There were many such in all Indian languages—Khandekar in Marathi, Karanth in Kannada, Tarashankar Banerji in Bengali and so on. Prem Chand has a rare spontaneity and rural charm, he brought from the colloquial Urdu conversational style. His personality was so self denying, unassuming and yet very unyielding. There is an interesting biography of this author written in English by Madan Gopal; those who can read Hindi can profit by the biography written by his son Amrit Rai. *Godan* in the English translation reads much like the original, yet it misses at places many subtleties and suggestive nuances of the original. I will cite one example: chapter 35 begins with this paragraph:

‘Hori’s position slowly worsened. He had always met with reverses in life but never given up courage: every day somehow strengthened him against fate. But now he was beginning to lose confidence in himself. He thought: had I remained steadfast in my *dharma*, that would have been some consolation. But how often have I violated the tenets of my *dharma*, chosen dishonest means, succumbed to practically every little temptation! Yet no ambition of my life had been realized; prosperity and happiness remain mirages. Like a beleaguered army, his interests were helplessly marooned on three *bigheys* of land, he starved, worked as a labourer, put up with every kind of ignoring, and somehow succeeded in warding off all assaults on his land’ (p. 270).



Now, when I compare this random sample with the original I find many things left out or slightly altered which put the whole picture in a slightly different perspective. In the first sentence in the original there is a phrase related to 'falling day by day', in the second 'the struggle for life' is totally missed, as it is related to a further *imagery* in the last sentence; the original says 'like a defeated king', which becomes in the translation 'a beleaguered army': I don't know how. The most inexcusable lapse is in the translation of *adharma*—it is not violation of the tenets of my *dharma* here. Simple 'wish' in the original becomes 'ambition' in translation, and all such minor changes, when accumulated, amount to a different picture of *hori*. At places the translator has tried to condense or summarize. And Premchand's meandering style suffers on account of this arbitrary editing. Yet, on the whole, this novel is a much faithful and very readable rendering of the original.

As a novel and as a translation *The Resignation* by Jainendra Kumar is the best Hindi work available in English. It is almost an existentialist novel. The pathos created by the predicament of Mrinal (the aunt of the narrator Dayal who has resigned his judge's position, as he feels that the established code of moral judgement is not tenable with ideal humanist values) is unique. It is not *Galsworthian* in the sense that it does not castigate society, the usual nineteenth century abstract monster easily evoked to beat about the bush, but lays the fault at the slow but inevitable deadening of human conscience, the erosion of the will to stop evil. Here Jainendra Kumar is doing something which touches 'the lower depths' of Dostoevsky and combines with it the empathy of Sarat Chandra for the lot of fallen women. Jainendra Kumar's *The Resignation* is a novel which has lasting value, its translation by Vatsayan is very satisfying.

There are many significant novels written in Hindi during the last twenty years and many are memorable for their technical skill, for authenticity, for the searching observation of surroundings. To mention only three of the last: Vatsayan's *Shekhar: Ek Jivani* or Hazārīprasad Dwivedi's *Bandhbhatta ki Atma Katha* or Amritlal Nāgar's *Bund aur Samudra* are remarkable works. But all of them are very difficult to translate, partly due to the large size or linguistic archaisms or localisms. Here one cannot give a full picture of all the work done in fiction in Hindi.



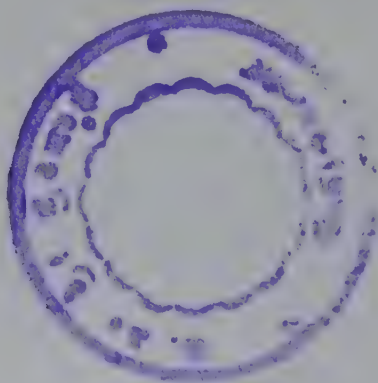
I have deliberately not mentioned the translation of several works in Indian languages and English into Hindi, which is quite bulky and bibliography of translations alone would run into hundreds of titles. In 1958 I had written an article in 'Babel', the international journal of translations sponsored by Unesco, on 'Translations in Hindi', and a reference to it would suffice.

To translate is to live simultaneously in two worlds, not only of two languages but of two levels of sensibilities. It is like building a bridge on two shifting points. Tagore rightly remarked that translation never satisfied him, it was like asking someone else to scratch one's back. One's own hand does not reach the spot, the other person either over-scratches or is not able to do the needful. The art of translation is growing more and more difficult in the context of modern writing: it is so frustrating to see that the contemporary idiom with all its stylistic experimentations and supple verbal innovations, is well nigh within the reach of one's comprehension and yet so tantalizingly distant. It is said that Joyce's *Ulysses* is translated in Japanese. I wonder how it could be done. Yet one need not despair. In any large-scale programme of translations in India, whether that of intra-translations in languages or in one from Indian languages into English or vice versa, the following hurdles will have to be faced:

- (1) the paucity of good bi-lingual translators,
- (2) the want of necessary tools of translation—bi-lingual diction references books, dialect lexicons *et al*,
- (3) the lack of systematic training for such technical work,
- (4) the desirability of including Indian materials in text-books, in school and college curricula in literature,
- (5) the lag on the part of literary little reviews or journals to publish more such translated material,
- (6) the crying need to immediately introduce separate departments and special chairs in comparative linguistics and comparative literatures in various universities,
- (7) the importance of research work to be conducted in such translations, comparative studies and inter-linguistic areas,
- (8) the overall consciousness to be created amongst editors, publishers, book distributors that a new readership is rapidly

growing, which does not want to remain confined to the narrow limits of its own language.

In a multi-lingual country like ours the sooner it is realized the better that understanding between different language groups will be fostered and developed only through a large-scale programme of translation and publication of the best in each language into another. Fiction being the most popular literary genre it can serve both as a mirror of the common man's life and taste as well as the barometer of literary achievement and excellence in a particular language. I have a strong feeling that the phase of regionalism in fiction, through which we were passing after independence is slowly waning and the age of the future novel—the novel with a religious-philosophical fourth dimension is dawning. Many authors are turning to the deeper fundamental problems, on which hangs the life-and-death of many social-topical phenomena. Though the attention of the novelist and the story-teller is held by such phenomena, within the narrow compass of a given situation, character or milieu, it is never the ultimate seeking or solace of a true artist. It is the basic reality which charms him, not the alluring appearances. He, as a creator of beauty, knows that the proper place of the essential cannot be substituted by the non-essential. Translation is merely reflection, the original must be luminous enough to hold the attention of the wide world. Translation, in a way, does one good, it shears off the irrelevant verbiage and it removes the encircling dross. Only the great in literature survives this ruthless test of translation. We are here to collect only those best and even shining particles in literature, in whatever language it may be.



## TRANSLATION OF INDIAN FICTION INTO ENGLISH

H. Y. SHARADA PRASAD

WE read the *Agamemnon* and we read Chekhov. With the *Agamemnon* we are conscious that it is a Gilbert Murray's translation. With Chekhov we have to remind ourselves it is a translation and most of us would not know the translator's name.

In this I believe is one test of successful translation of fiction, and a difference from translation of poetry. A South Indian musician once said an accompanying violinist ought to be like the vocalist's *dharmapatni*. This probably should apply to the art of translation.

The translator does not efface his personality, but does not assert any individual right of expression. He operates at two levels of consciousness: recreating in a new language the original vision to the best approximation; at the same time restraining himself from taking on the attribute of a creative writer in his own right. This kind of balance is possible in the translation of fiction, with the translator exercising the self-denying ordinance. He cannot do it in lyric or dramatic poetry. A successful translation of a poem becomes almost an independent poem, achieving a unique fusion of idea and melodic pattern. Thus B. M. Srikantia's 'English Geetaganu' were really 'Kannada Geetaganu' (Kannada lyrics). When writing them he said his intention was to dress the one in the habiliments of the other. But indeed he did more. 'English Geetaganu' was certainly not an English woman wearing a Bangalore sari. It is not insignificant that in the process of rendering in English, 'Sri' often Indianises the context. When the context is too special to a culture, the translator does not hesitate to skip it—for example K. V. Puttappa while translating Prospero's farewell speech in 'Birugali'. Much of the associative suggestion of a group of words or images has to be sacrificed in translation. This is true of Gokak's (and to a smaller extent A. K. Ramanujan's) renderings of Bendre in English.



There is some truth in the theory that the language of poetry is less susceptible than prose to vogues and changes. The contemporary idiom in prose has indeed a very short half-life. In English specially it would be possible to place a piece of prose-writing within ten years of the date of authorship. This is one of the great difficulties an Indian faces when he translates from an Indian language into English. Most Indians, when learning English, learn English of a particular vintage—late Victorian mostly, or Edwardian-Shavian, or the English of the days when Strachey and Lucas and Lynd ruled (and our college curricula laid stress on their essays.) To write Edwardian English in an office note or in a Government document or even a newspaper report is harmless. It can be tolerated even in a personal letter. But when we set out to translate Karanth or Masti into period English, an antique quality comes in which we miss, but the reader whose mother-tongue is English at once feels. A bold vernacular English like Raja Rao's in *Kanthapura* or Amos Tutuola's might even become a special attraction. But an unconscious use of speech of a past age, or, worse still, the mixture of several speeches (the English of most of us lets Time magazine-American coexist with Addison's and Steele's English) irritates. This applies to translations as well as original work in English (Kailasam's English plays are an extreme example). This is one of the reasons why it is hard to read 'Godaan' in English or Bandopadhyaya's 'Boatmen of the Padma'. The narrative and conversations of the English 'Godaan' seem to be written in two different textures of English.

With some trepidation I offer two examples to illustrate what I mean by period English and two textures. Both are from A. N. Moorthy Rao's translation of Shivrama Karanth's 'Marali Mannige'.

Example I: Mayya had decided to run into the expense of engaging for the marriage celebrations the services of Koraga the famous pipe-player: and he wouldn't get his money's worth if the music was drowned by the chatter of the palm-leaves greeting the wind. But while Mayya could exile these leaves he could not get rid of the palm trees standing about on the beach like so many gaunt devils nodding noisy appreciation of the music. Koraga was invited, and he came. But it may be doubted whether the piper heard his own music during those four days—so fiercely

it rained and blew all the time. The plaited palm-leaves fastened with six-fold knots to the pandal were blown off leaving the bamboo framework naked to the wind.

Example II. Parvati, weak though she was, was conscious almost till the last moment, 'No, you must not say that . . . if you had not married Satya, would there be any one to perform my funeral ceremonies?' And a moment later she said, 'Has Laccha come?'

'He will be here soon'.

Sarasvati observed her difficult breathing. 'Parvati, shall I give you holy water? Can you pronounce the Lord Narayana's name?' Parvati's eyes rested on her. 'Yes, I shall . . . If I am too weak you must say it in my ear'. There was a look on her face—as of some unfulfilled desire. Sarasvati spoke to her again. 'Parvati, there is something you desire, some longing?'

'No . . . nothing'.

'Is it that you want to see Laccha?'

'No . . . do you think that he . . . would take my head on his lap for a moment?'—There was defeat in those weak faltering tones. Satyabhama was there listening. The realization of the years of dumb suffering she had brought to the dying woman, and the uncomplaining resignation with which she had endured it all burst upon her of a sudden. Sobbing, she ran to her husband who was at the family shrine repeating his prayers. 'Oh, please, please come at once. Sister is dying, and she is asking, may she rest her head on your feet'.

From a cursory reading of translations and from some (although very small) experience of translating from English to Kannada and from Kannada to English I would hazard this remark: a translator succeeds better when he translates something into the language that is his mother-tongue. The opportunity I had of reading a few Japanese novels in English—some translated by Japanese and others translated by Americans—confirms me in this view. Some of us may indeed express ourselves more forcefully in English than in our own language (this would be true of a large part of the 'educated' class in India) but when it is a matter of literary expression it is in our mother-tongues that we can achieve something distinctive. There are exceptions, of course. Indians who live in the



Indian and Western worlds simultaneously can indeed produce the genuine article in English. I would only mention Narayana Menon's translation of 'Chemmeen'. Narayana Menon does not ask us to make any aesthetic concessions on the ground that it is a translation after all. He achieves that ideal of the translator's craft not to draw attention to the medium or the translator's own excellence. He takes us to Thakazhi's Kerala, without intruding any Englishness on the scene.

How faithful Narayana Menon is to the original I have no idea. But does it matter? This 'faithfulness' is perhaps one of the main problems of translation. Must the translator be word-to-word, sentence-to-sentence faithful? The result may be something like the post office or gripe water vernacular that we had to read in the old days. The good translator should think of the paragraph as the unit of feeling in translation. The question is not so simple as to be dismissed with 'Translate the spirit and not the mere words'. The words are the spirit. That is why it is literature. The translator, like the author, lives in and through words. But there are nuances that the original might suggest which the translator often has to forego deliberately so as not to load his narrative with pendants and qualifications. Readability is not everything—but readability is no small virtue.

It is good also to remember that there are certain expressions that are untransposable from one culture to another. It is easy enough to say 'ಮಾಡಿದರಾಯಿತು' in Kannada. How is it rendered in English? 'Let us do in good time', or 'There is no hurry about it'? Neither brings out that exact flavour of attitude to action in a Karma society. Mr Kamaraj Nadar's 'Parkalaam' is another handy example of an untranslatable expression. Untranslatability is even more evident in book titles. What would be 'Bettada Jeeva' or 'Suno Janamejaya' in English? Likewise many of the scientific and technological words that pass effortlessly into everyday speech and metaphor in English would be impossible to render in Kannada or the other Indian languages.

This cultural leap is perhaps the translator's most difficult problem. It would be easier to translate from Tamil or Hindi or Bengali into Kannada, and from French or Italian or Russian into English than from an Indian language into English. Among Indian languages, as among European languages, there is a shared



stock of consciousness, experience, expression, metaphor, linguistic gesture which is an intermediate area between the purely regional/national and the universal. The translator's task of rendering the Indian into Western, which is hard enough, is made harder by the differing levels of evolution of the two families of literatures. We must be frank and acknowledge that our linguistic and literary resources are as underdeveloped as our economic resources. The individual master is not affected by this. The triumph of Bendre's poetry or Masti's prose is a triumph over the limitations of the language. But the corpus of literary effort would still show serious lacks. Being written for the Kannada reader of the present day, most of our novels are governed by the law of consumer demand. The consumer demands story; our novelists give it. Analysis, leisurely observation, irony—there is too little of these yet in Kannada fiction (or probably in most Indian fiction). This is one reason why the 'Boatmen of the Padma' or even Brindavanlal Varma's 'Chitralekha' in English reads more like the synopsis of a novel than like the novel itself. The larger part of the translated Indian stories we read in 'The Illustrated Weekly' seem to be too hastily and roughly written. The writer seems to want to get the thing off his chest. Unlike our musicians, our authors are not very fond of 'neraval'. Indians writing in English, probably because they write in English, have more of observation, irony and subtlety. In fact it is the fashion with mother-tongue authors to accuse the Indo-Anglians of superficiality. I translated two novels of R. K. Narayan into Kannada. I got some satisfaction from 'Swami and Friends'. The very novelty of its theme was something fresh to Kannada. But the low-key narrative of 'The Dark Room' was lost in Kannada. I readily concede that this might have been due to my own inadequacy. But I do feel the Kannada readers expect the Kannada novel to be something like the Kannada (or Hindi) film. And few English film-goers would have patience with that.

## CRITICAL STUDY OF A KANNADA NOVEL: RAO BAHADUR'S 'GRAMAYANA'

K. D. KURTKOTI

THE modern Kannada novel—we mean the social novel in our language—is nearly half a century old. During this stretch of time, it has effectively portrayed the life and society of this region and has emerged as a powerful form of literature. One can recognise in the growth and development of this form two distinct modes of writing. The first one is the idealist mode, which aimed at the portrayal of daydreaming heroes inspired by high idealism and a sense of social well-being. The second mode, ably represented by Shri Shivaram Karanth, aimed at social criticism. If judged only by his total output, Karanth is surely the major writer of Kannada fiction today. But one feels that the contours of the novel-form created by Karanth are fixed, that the potentialities of that form remain untapped and unharnessed. The younger writers who have followed these two modes of fiction-writing have practically nothing to add to the form; all through these years, we notice that the trend is towards a well-made novel.

In the early phase of Modern Kannada literature, the novelist at least took the novel as a serious form of literature. Recently, however, the novel in general has lost all its literary qualities and has been reduced to popular entertainment. As a result, a genuinely good work by a young writer is often seriously handicapped by these popular works. The situation is unfortunate, but it is also a challenge to the writer to prove his worth, to improve upon the popular novel which has not progressed technically at all.

*Gramayana*, published in 1960, is, in spite of being the first work of Shri Rao Bahadur, a unique work of art. Like many good Kannada novels, it is also a faithful picture of our society and has a well-knit plot and living characters. But the greatness of *Gramayana* lies in its being much more intent on the exploration of reality than on simple reflection of it. The following analysis will attempt to demonstrate and support my theories about this novel.

*Gramayana* proposes to narrate the story of a village in the northern region of Karnataka; the period of action is placed in the latter part of the nineteenth century, during the days of the British Raj in India. The life depicted in the novel is truly representative of the community life of any village in India. The village in those days was quite compact; the social hierarchy was clearly demarcated, and the differences among men were accepted with dignity and honour. The sheer knowledge of the writer about this society, its customs and manners, surprises us with its range and variety. The theme is presented with complete objectivity, yet with poignant sympathy.

The novel is without a hero, choosing for its protagonist the whole village community. Thus, the characters, though complex, have no separate development as individuals. It is really surprising that in a novel which runs over six hundred pages it is hard to get a single domestic glimpse of any of the characters. This is not to say that the characters are not developed at all; rather, the development of a character always suggests a phase in the process of social disintegration which is the theme of the novel. The molestation of Chimana, the first important episode of the novel, becomes a community problem, a signal affair for which the whole community must assume responsibility. Sin becomes a great force, leading the village towards destruction. There is no internal conflict in the mind of the individual due to his consciousness of his own sin, but the sense of sin pervades like atmosphere. The village, having exposed its good and evil deeds, seems to be waiting for judgement from above.

But the process of disintegration does not start from Chimana's molestation itself. The seeds of destruction are sown long before that event. The persons in this novel are rooted deeply in the soil. Balacharya knows the streets of Padalli as intimately as he knows the palm leaves of scriptures which he handles daily. Shankarappagouda protects the honour of his village as a chaste woman would guard her own character. The sixty-year-old Jinnappa has crossed the limits of the village only once in his lifetime. Shankarappagouda's wife refuses to leave her house during the epidemic. The Maharaja of the neighbouring town feels nostalgic about Padalli, the village of his ancestors. These characters represent what is good in life, but by their helplessness they invite evil; the persons who bring evil are all outsiders. This



fact reveals the inner tragedy of the novel. From this point of view, the molestation of Chimana, the orphaned daughter of Nana, is not only the central episode of the novel, but its central symbol. Padadayya, who is responsible for this act, is not only an outsider, but an ascetic as well; hence, in an ironical way, he is free from social morals. Chimana has been aptly compared to an unguarded field, and this analogy has a marked bearing on the theme of the novel. After her shameful seduction, Chimana tries to commit suicide more than once and wanders like a waif away from her home. But she does continue to live, dying only at the end of the novel.

The Chimana theme recurs symbolically in every episode of the novel. Lingappa, a shepherd of the neighbouring village, becomes illegal heir to the property of Shankarappagouda, whose death left it in the hands of a helpless woman. Padadayya guards the property of the monastery like a serpent. Bapusaheb continues to own the property of his sister even after her death. All three conspire to possess Chimana, and they are successful to a certain extent. That they are successful again helps to bring out the technical importance of Chimana's character. These possessive outsiders are out to violate the sanctity of the people's values. By corrupting the power of the authorities, they gain in power. Padadayya, an ascetic, gathers drunkards in the monastery, and it is he who has seduced Chimana, and taking advantage of his irresponsible position, has left her to Lingappa. Lingappa gets possession of Shankarappagouda's already-sown field by ploughing it a second time. This act is the most powerful gesture of profaning the life-values. Those who could remedy the situation are absolutely helpless. The Maharaja is an absentee-landlord, with only a vague love for the people; he comes and disappears like a romantic vision. Shivayogiswami, the new head of the monastery, is forced to leave the village, becoming only a legend of miracles. Mr Gibson, the District Collector, is an Englishman by birth, ignorant of the people and their language; his sense of justice cannot go beyond the limits of the law. He is humane, but because of his unfamiliarity with the people he cannot distinguish between good and evil. The situation inevitably leads to a headlong ruin.

The strength of the narration lies in the author's interest more in the process than in the end. The novel is filled with

innumerable details which would have become unwieldy in a merely well-made novel. The importance of *Gramayana*, however, is in the artistic use of these details. But for the details the novel would be only a formula of conflict between good and evil ending in a communal tragedy. Even the minor details are worked out with extreme care and honesty, and this attention to the small details indicates the author's attitude towards life. None of the details is unnecessary or accidental. Let us take an example. The cholera epidemic takes a heavy toll. Balya, the untouchable, and the members of his family die the same day, and the corpses lie huddled on a gunny sack. The same day, Putalbai commits suicide. Later, Shankarappagouda dies of cholera. Separated from the context this series of deaths would seem melodramatic. But in the novel these happenings are structurally related and assume a scope of meaning greater than mere narration. The death of Balya rouses a human understanding in Shankarappagouda, but his own death closes an epoch and creates fresh problems in the story. The implications of Putalbai's death are perhaps the most complex. She dies in order to save others, particularly Dada, from false allegation and punishment. But the fact that her death raises many more complicated issues is, in itself, an ironical comment on the value of her sacrifice. The abundance of details in *Gramayana* not only helps to depict life in its entirety but essentially convinces the reader of the complex nature of the principles that govern life and death.

The author's dexterity in the arrangement of details is remarkable. When he must directly represent action, he takes recourse to the dramatic mode of writing, i.e., the interpenetration of character and action. The death of Shankarappagouda, the police sub-inspector Fagruddin's durbar, the misbehaviour of Lingappa with Chimana—these episodes are full of a dramatic intensity rarely found in the Kannada Novel. In the course of the novel, we find some chapters of choric tenor: the women gossiping on the banks of the river, the drunkards indulging in loose talk in the monastery, the grave-diggers mimicking the way of life of the dead, rewriting the history of the village in their own way. This writing throws into bold relief what W. B. Yeats describes as 'emotion of the multitude'. Both these modes of writing are inextricably mingled in the last chapter, that is, the writer has used the temporal as well as the non-temporal, or



dialectical, mode to represent reality. This can be shown by analysing one of the events in the last chapter. As the rains pour down heavily, the village writhes under the grip of plague. A group of devotees collect and begin to sing the praise of God to ward off the plague, but the singing becomes as contagious as the plague itself. The river is in flood, and towards midnight it silently enters the village. The house-walls have begun to crumble, and the few who have survived the plague take shelter in the temple and in the school-building. Again there are minor tragedies enacted within the enveloping folds of the elements' action. Chimana burns herself to death while Lingappa tried to seduce her. Shaṅkarappagouda's wife dies in her own house, which she refused to leave during the epidemic. Balacharya, who has lost his wife and consequently his wits, wanders about. The river-water and the rain-water mingle and wipe out the border between life and death. The verses from the *Gita* chanted by Balacharya and Mayappa's devotional song are ironical comments on the situation. Balacharya returns from the river mechanically chanting verses from the *Gita* and finds that the wall of the only dry room in his house has collapsed. He again mechanically chants.

The juxtaposition of scriptural reality and the dead body is immensely suggestive, and it makes Balacharya experience the metaphysic of the reality of the soul. Next night he tries hard to remember the verse, when he actually feels the rushing river beneath his feet. The theme of Mayappa's is the pitiful cry of the body to the soul when it takes its leave. Mayappa repeats the lines of this folk-song over and over while in the ante-room of the monastery Lingappa is pitifully knocking on the closed doors to get near Chimana. The formal resemblance between these two events is remarkable. At the same moment, Balacharya is wandering in the streets. The conflicting thoughts in his mind not only reflect the surrounding disorder and his own derangement; they also convey the reality of the novel. When we think of the progress of action in the novel, one thing strikes us deeply. The story at the outset is filled with external actions which are intensely dramatic in nature. As it progresses, the external actions give place to inward conflicts and speculative thought. The active participants become weary and inactive, and those who are internally alert keep awake. This change in the structure of the



narrative is important from the point of view of the inner significance of the novel.

*Gramayana* is a populous novel, and it is peopled with active characters. Shankarappagouda, Dada, Padadayya, and Sheshappa are men of great abilities. They are always up and doing, and it is they who share most of the action in the novel. The history of Padalli is coloured and enlivened by their good or bad deeds. It seems as if these characters have no time to think at all. Of course, persons like Shankarappagouda are sometimes forced to think about the consequences of their deeds, but that thinking is on a purely ethical plane. As ethics is mainly concerned with the course of action, it has nothing to do with the ultimate problems of human destiny. Moreover, ethical thoughts can never be detached and hence, they are limited.

But none of these characters has any consciousness that would go beyond the ethical plane. Now, if the novelist himself had explained the reality embodied in the story, he would have damaged the contours of the novel. As it is, the character of Balacharya does that job for the author. He becomes the central consciousness of the novel.

Here I would like to emphasize the difference between Balacharya and similar characters we find in other 'Kannada novels.' The heroes of those novels very often satisfy the intellectual demand of the novel, but as they are generally the mouthpiece of the author they live outside the novel. The characters of Hoovaya in Shri Kuvempu's *Kanooru Subbamma Heggaditi* and Narahari in Shri Gokak's *Samarasave Jeevana* are of this type. The learned sensibility of Hoovaya has very little to do with the life depicted in the novel. This doesn't mean that he is a rebel (although in his own educated way he rebels against the superstitions of the rural populace) against the society in which he has to live. The rebel shares the same sensibility of the society against which he revolts. The development of Gokak's Narahari is one-sided, and he grows soliptic. The result is that there are areas of pure reflection in these otherwise active novels. These characters grow alien to their surroundings and rise above them, leaving the rest of life hopelessly in the lurch. The individual consciousness is valuable and useful only when it becomes the refined product of the communal sensibility.

Considered from this standpoint, the character of Balacharya

is a great success. At the beginning of the novel, we find him to be one of the elders of the village and a member of the village *panchayat*. He is the only person among the elders who has an intellectual bent of mind. But all his intelligence in the beginning is mere shrewdness, an outcome of his awareness of his own lack of power or position. At the time of Nana's death, when the selfishness of the members of the *panchayat* is exposed, he mentally withdraws in sheer distrust. This estrangement is also a result of obstinacy inherent in his nature. This particular event contributes greatly to the development of his character. After his withdrawal, he becomes, though involved in the action, a detached presence amid the turmoil of life. His son is already dead and has shown him the way to selflessness. But the selflessness of Balacharya is not the same as the humanist ideal of selfless service; it is much more profound. His learning and power are very much limited, and he knows his limitations. He has no hold over people like Shankarappagouda, nor has he the intricate legal knowledge of Sheshappa. He doesn't even know how to read Kannada script and was deceived into signing a petition against Shamaraao, whom he supported. The only books he has read are *Shrimad Bhagavatam* and *Bhagavad Gita*, because as a priest he has to live on them. The knowledge got from these books is meant for self-realization and is useless in the practical affairs of life. Apart from this, he knows the life around him intimately, and his knowledge is alive with understanding.

Through his sympathetic understanding he receives knowledge in terms of experience. He is compelled to become an introvert when he sees disorder spreading in the village. His thoughts about the social disorder of Padalli described in Chapter XVII are purely personal. He examines the social disorder in the light of his own family crisis. As the novel progresses, the sphere of his consciousness widens and the complexity of life unfolds itself before his eyes. Every moment he is forced to recognise the right point of behaviour among the conflicting values.

The behaviour of Balacharya is deeply influenced by this wisdom. With great difficulty, he detaches himself from the world of action, even though he is very much involved in it. When one ethically justified value is compelled to be defeated by another similarly justified value, he chooses one and resorts to silence. He neither defends his helplessness nor rationalizes his behaviour.



When people begin to die of cholera, he dispenses a herb to them. People develop a great faith in the healing power of this medicine. At the close of the day, when only a small piece of it is left, he hands it over to an untouchable woman whose brother is down with cholera. He rushes to Shankarappagouda's house, hearing that he also has caught cholera. Then he realises that his supply of the herb is exhausted. He is compelled to speak the truth when Shankarappagouda's wife asks him for it. He remains unmoved by his helplessness to prevent Shankarappagouda's death. Whenever he is confronted with defeat, he is more and more convinced of the complexity of life and the mystery of human destiny. His behaviour, inspired by a few simple convictions that have grown with his character, becomes puzzling to others. Dada, a man of lower caste, is hunted by the police, and Balacharya, an orthodox Brahmin, hides him in his room where household gods are kept and worshipped. When Chimana dies leaving her child, Balacharya hands over that child to an untouchable. The only passion left to him is to restore a kind of order in the otherwise chaotic life. Finally, when he completely realises that life goes beyond his control, he loses his wits and stands in the naked, fundamental darkness as he is taken away by the floods. Paradoxically enough, he experiences an awareness of something which the intellect cannot grasp, a supersensual environment of the soul. But again, in spite of this rare consciousness, the character of Balacharya is never allowed to live outside the novel. Even his metaphysical consciousness has its roots in the soil of Padalli and is thus organically related to the life of the surroundings.

Finally, it can be said of *Gramayana* that the novel, in its own way, has tried to answer the question of modernity in Kannada literature. Fiction-writing in Kannada is still in its infancy and it has its obligations to the public as the most popular type of literature. It cannot altogether dispense with plots and characters and grow beyond the popular conception of the novel.

Moreover, it has yet to exhaust the potentialities of the life of our region, potentialities which still need vital expression. *Gramayana* is also conditioned by this situation and has largely employed dramatic incidents and active characters. But the greatness of *Gramayana* lies in the fact that in spite of its being a straight-forward narration, it is also an exploration of the nature of reality.



## CRITICAL STUDY OF A TELUGU NOVEL: BUCHIBABU'S 'CHIVARAKU MIGILEDI'

P. PADMARAJU

THE temptation to make tall claims on behalf of one's own language in any assembly like this is rather overpowering. But for once, I would prefer to stick to facts as I see them, having indulged in fiction for the better part of my life. Honestly, there are no great novels in Telugu. But let me not give the impression that novel writing is in a poor state in Andhra. It is the most popular literary form from the readers' point of view. Hundreds of novels are being published every year; some of them make very good reading; a few of them are artistically satisfying. But I haven't come across one which appealed to me as great.

I have no claims to scholarship and my reading, though extensive, has been desultory. I am afraid, I cannot give you an adequate definition of what constitutes greatness in a novel. I can only claim that I recognise a great novel when I read one. There are glimpses of greatness in *Chivaraku Migiledi*.

The novel unveils the story of Dayanidhi, a young man born and bred in the Northern Circars, who finds himself unable to make his peace with his environment. Some 'indiscretions' of his mother haunt him throughout his life and poison it. But his mother is not portrayed in this novel in any detail. Even her 'indiscretions' are not specifically mentioned. The author concerns himself with their effect on the life of the son. He feels himself isolated and goes to Rayalaseema to start life afresh.

An accident brings him a fortune. He was almost settling down for a life of comfort, when his own past and that of his mother's, pursue him even there. He somehow manages to escape alive, and goes in search of another place to start his life all over again. In an admirably written preface (which he calls 'offering') to the first edition of the novel, the author explains the central purpose of the novel. There were several who dealt with this theme in their writings in the past. The story of Renuka and Jamadagni from our classical literature is one such. In

*Hamlet*, Shakespeare tried to present the same theme. But T. S. Eliot thinks he failed in his attempt.

The author goes on to say that in this novel he tried to balance the external forces and the suffering they caused to the central figure of the story.

When this novel first appeared as a serial in *Navodaya*, a literary magazine which aimed high and lived short, a comment went about in literary circles that Buchibabu was turning out a novel on the lines of Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*. There were many reasons for this impression. Nidhi, the central character of *Chivaraku Migiledi*, starts as a medical student, like Philip of *Of Human Bondage*. Both fall in love with girls of questionable character. Their love is an intense physical craving for the girls. Even the girls have something in common. Both have flat chests and mercurial temperaments. Sally whom Philip ultimately marries, is not unlike Aritham in *Chivaraku Migiledi*. Even the authors have something in common. Their philosophical approach to life and its problems is essentially a writer's approach. They have no specific system of value to propagate in their writings. But Buchibabu imparts the touch of the poet to whatever he writes, while Maugham does not make even that attempt. Both are introspective. They are capable of being objective even with regard to their own writing. In the introductions to their novels, both concede the possibility of improving their novels by abridging them, and they actually helped in the publication of abridged versions. The first edition of *Chivaraku Migiledi*, runs to about 450 pages in very small, almost unreadable print.

There is another reason why the novel appears to be semi-autobiographical. The author says in his introduction that he deliberately omitted the details regarding the mother's misdeeds. Not only that, he has scrupulously kept Nidhi's entire family, his father, mother, brother and sister-in-law, behind a thick veil of secrecy. The reader knows with a certain amount of intimacy even those characters in the novel who make their appearance casually and go away. But we know next to nothing about the brother who threw his mother's box into the street saying, 'If father is willing to drive her out, what objection can you have?' and about the father who, Nidhi suspects, had strangled his mother.

The author deliberately shrouded these events in an atmosphere of mystery. No doubt these events form only the background of the story and are not the central theme of the novel. But a suspicion remains in the mind of the reader that the author omitted these details for intimately personal reasons. This is also why the novel gives the impression of being more of an autobiography than it should.

The chief merit of the novel is that the author combines in it irrepressible liveliness with an undercurrent of awe-inspiring heaviness of a philosophical nature. There is a distant cousin of Nidhi, Jagannatham by name. He makes his appearance in the second chapter of the novel along with his married sister, Amritham about whom I will have occasion to tell you a little later. Jagannatham, or Jaggu for short, is full of life. He is just in his teens and spreads laughter and movement wherever he walks. He plays innocent pranks on every one without giving offence and always talks in an affected bookish language now and then lapsing into his natural speech. His good humour is contagious and his presence lends colour to any scene. But this taste for high-flown language is the expression of a hidden self in him which constantly tries to reach out towards higher things of real consequence.

He ends up as a young man running a hermitage-cum social education centre somewhere on the banks of the Godavary. Externally he is just the same in his mannerisms of speech and his flamboyancy. But when Nidhi asks him if he never feels the need for a wife, Jaggu replies:

Idle fellows have many needs. My hands are full. I bathe in the Godavary early in the morning, then I milk the cows. Then there is gardening to be attended to. Then cooking. Noon, I read the newspapers, then chess, then lessons to my students, light tea in the evenings. Then some twenty-five disciples gather. I teach them till ten in the night. A King's life. No earnings and no expenditure. Disciples bring me what I need. In five years this is going to become one of the biggest universities. That is the secret of life. You go on doing something without caring for the result, the world will bow before your feet. Ask something of it, then it strikes a pose.



Even here Jaggu combines in him a strong inclination towards philosophical quest, and an affection of a light-hearted manner of speech.

Buchibabu has drawn arrestingly vivid pictures of men and women and of places in this novel. The vividness is both visual and psychological. There are three women with whom Nidhi, the hero of the story, gets emotionally involved. One is his mother who is always there in the background and affects him both from within and without. She dies in the very first chapter but is there with him till the end. People talk about her guilt and Nidhi reacts to it always. His irritation is directed towards his mother as well as towards people who talk about her. Even his father refers to her with reluctance as if she were an unmentionable topic. His mother's guilt is like the club-foot of Philip in *Of Human Bondage*. Only in this case, the handicap is a psychological one. But it hurts all the same. It isolates him from his environment. He thinks it is the people who treat him ill for the wrongs of his mother. But in his heart of hearts he knows that his consciousness of his mother's guilt drives him into voluntary isolation. He does several unconventional things and when people talk about them he blames them. The memory of his mother is linked in him with intense feelings of love and hatred. He recalls with touching tenderness that it was only his mother who encouraged him in his affair with Komali. 'Only his mother understands; blood speaks'. When he becomes rich almost overnight, and builds a posh bungalow for himself, he suffers a statue of his mother to be made and set up in the front yard. His past again introduces into his present in the shape of Komali. Then people start talking about his mother. Someone destroys the statue and he feels a great relief as if a huge burden were taken out of him. Then he feels free to find fulfilment in the love of Komali. In the beginning, Komali treats him with contempt.

She threw a blade of grass at him; indicating he was no better.

Life treated his mother as if she were a blade of grass.

On one occasion in his frenzy he accuses Komali of being loose. She retorts she is not worse than his mother. His answer is a slap.

Komali makes her first appearance in the novel as a girl, immature both physically and mentally.

Her chest had not attained a definite shape and looked like a boy's . . . She looked as though God had left off making her limbs half way.

How could Komali be a wife? The idea made one laugh. Could she bear children? Could she cook? No one should marry her. She shouldn't belong to any one man. The moon, the stars, the sea, the Taj Mahal, the parks, belonged to no one in particular. They were there for every one to look at from a distance and enjoy. Komali was like them. She was a socialised institution of beauty.

She sat on the bank of the pond tucking up her legs under her in an uncouth posture. A wave, forming slowly spread the image of her face to the other bank; a stone image in water, utterly devoid of character; a face which hid in its cold depths a certain warmth.

She was a creature who should always go about jumping and pirouetting amidst grassy paths patting and befriending the earth and the sky.

With her touch, Nature which had grown dumb with nameless doubts, suddenly clears its throat.

About the time his craving for Komali becomes an obsession, Amritham (or Ammulu to her family) makes her appearance. Here is one of the finest portrayals of mature womanhood in our literature. She is beautiful without being showy, wise without being clever or even intelligent; behind her inconsequential talk is a certain dignity; she has no demands to make but can give her all.

When you look at her you feel you are looking at a sun set in a valley. She laughs with fullness, dignity and gravity like a queen looking at the ruins of her palace, where she once held court in all her splendour . . .

Her real abode is somewhere among ruins, like Hampi, amongst stones, broken statues, pillars standing in isolation, figures of princesses whose hearts turned to stone for love, all in a state of precarious alertness, as if waiting for a midnight footstep, a sigh to make them move. She would sit amidst them with a melancholy smile on her lips . . .

When she weeps over the past glory and tears overflow the bounds of her being, they flow down the cleavage between her breasts and swell into this river of today. If she weeps further her tears would flood the world. No, she shouldn't weep. And then she smiles heavy with pathos. Then Beauty reaches the end of her pilgrimage and turns her to stone.

Suddenly Komali goes away from his life. His cousin Susheela, a shallow girl also in love with Nidhi remarks contemptuously, 'You flirt with that worm from the dungheap', and Nidhi makes the mental comment, 'Here is jealousy calling Beauty names'. Susheela is very much stuck on Nidhi, but her father indicates his disapproval of the alliance and his father fixes up another match for Nidhi. The marriage in itself is not an event of any importance in his life, but events succeeding it are significant. The marriage function is described in cryptic phrases so characteristic of Buchibabu, but it is presented as Nidhi saw it:

Bride's party and Groom's party are like two armies ranged against each other in a battle field. The Bride's party is ultimately defeated. The prince leads the princess away with him. They retire into their solitude proclaiming, oh, leave us alone, we do not want the empire.

The armies are nonplussed and make a treaty feeling let down by their respective chiefs . . .

The groom is like a lion newly brought into the zoo. Women from the bride's party visit him on various pretexts.

Oh, what a man !

Wherefrom did they bring him and at what price?

Price? Three meals a day and three thousand,

The lion is opening its mouth, let us hear it roar.

That is the essence of the whispers of the womenfolk.

Nidhi marries in good faith and treats his wife well during the brief visit to the *ashram* of the Swamiji after the marriage. He tries his best to put her at her ease and puts on her finger the ring sent by Amritham who could not attend the marriage.

By a sort of mad impulse he joins the *Sathyagraha* movement just on the eve of his nuptials and his father-in-law, being in the police department, does not approve of this. Nidhi never again



sees Indira, his wife, till her death years later. It looks as though he took refuge in the non-co-operation movement to escape from the commitment of a married life. Then he starts practising in Eluru. Here he treats a woman patient, the sister of a friend of his. She is a mental case and he diagnoses her trouble as 'Negation of Love'. He puts her up in his own house and naturally there is talk all round; a demented young woman living with a young, unattached doctor living all alone is certainly a topic for comment. Nidhi puts it down to the deliberate ill-will of society. If he had the elementary common sense, he would not have put the lady in such an embarrassing position. But at bottom, he knows that he is himself a mental case and in certain sober moments doubts the wisdom of his undertaking the cure of another mental case. The net result is that his practice dwindles and he finds himself isolated from the life of the town. It is in this peculiarly helpless condition that Amritham comes to visit him. One fateful night they come together. It is a moment when thought, logic, reason are washed away in a primeval flood of life. Two lives centred in a struggle—somewhere that struggle has its roots in reality. Blood becomes fire and purifies the body. The limbs separate into living cells. Body filled with this experience is transformed into the soul.

But this is not something which happened purely by accident. Amritham would give anything he demanded from her. But Amritham is not a fallen woman in the sense that Komali or his mother is. 'She has no sense of guilt when she offered herself to his embrace. But he is afraid to face her in the morning. During the early hours of dawn, Nidhi takes some two hundred rupees from her box and goes away leaving her a note.

His life in Rayalaseema follows the same pattern. First he could not recognise any humanness in the people. He equated them with stones which he found everywhere. He engaged himself in treating people afflicted by malnutrition and epidemics. A famine is taking its toll. There he meets Ananthachary and the association develops into a friendship. Then Nidhi comes back to a normal frame of mind and notices that men are men everywhere. He receives a letter from Jagannatham in which among other things is the news that Amritham is carrying sixth month. He is beset by doubts. In his heart of hearts he wanted that the child should be his. He is almost certain it is.

But would her husband suspect anything? Suppose he discards her? But what he and Amritham did was natural. Any two human beings would have done the same. When any one tries to assert his humanness, the society takes him to task. But whatever one does, he has to feel it is right. Looking at it through others' eyes and determining its value is the mark of cowardice. But all these intellectual justifications did not give him peace of mind. It is in this confused state of mind, that he finds Kathyayani, the precious stone. He names it after the eldest daughter of Ananthachary, a girl of about fourteen or fifteen, who is very much attached to Nidhi. He sells it to a merchant from Bombay for a fabulous price and floats a company for prospecting the area for a diamond mine. Then comes Komali to live with him. By now he has got over that physical craving for her which made him almost mad in the earlier days. Though Ananthachary and family accept his association with her, the workers and the general public look upon it with suspicion. Gradually the suspicion turns into positive dislike. It ultimately crystalises into the traditional hatred of the people of Rayalaseema for those of the Northern Circars. Both Ananthachary and he try their best to stem the current of this ugly drift. But Nidhi's lapses are unconventional. Had he erred in the accepted manner, he could have lived amicably with his fellow human beings. Had he for instance treated Komali as kept-woman so far as the people around him are concerned, he could have won his lost ground. But he is too honest to let go his values and accept those of conventional society. (So whatever efforts he makes towards rehabilitating himself are doomed to failure.)

He gets information that his wife is on death bed. He goes there more or less willingly. She dies and he performs the obsequies.

He visits Jagannatham in his *Ashram*. Jaggu is now a young man but the mannerisms of his boyhood are still there. He is, in spite of the levity he affects, wedded to an idea zealously. From there he goes to see Amritham. He is not sure how she would receive him. Amritham received him with a smile on her face as if there is nothing between them, which can cause any embarrassment, and he feels reassured. She refers to the child as his son in the presence of her mother-in-law and husband so naturally as not to give scope for any suspicion. During the night, he hopes she would come to him and open her heart. But she



had nothing to tell him—nothing that she could not in the presence of others. There is a sense of fulfilment and also a feeling of dissatisfaction in the mind of Nidhi as he left for his place. Amritham is the mother without her guilt to him. He is gratified that he has perpetuated himself in her.

Quick tragedy overtakes him on his arrival in Nyayapuram. Narayya, his trusted servant, receives head injuries in a feud and dies. His house, his mine, everything is ruined by the frenzy of the mob. His mother's statue is broken into bits. Someone makes an attempt on his life, and he flees the country with Komali with no earthly possessions, but with a number of questions filling his consciousness: What have I achieved, fame? money? love? Has life any meaning? Who am I? Who are they? To all the queries, why, where, when, how, who there are no answers. Everything melts into nothingness leaving him, the ultimate residue. On the boat with Jaggu, the emergence of Kathyayani radiant after the rain, the midnight fire which lit up Amritham, which burnt him to intoxication, the parrot in the cage, memories of his marriage, still earlier Komali running in the garden in her wet clothes, the ring he slipped on to the finger of Indira, the town hall in Eluru, the funeral pyre of his mother—out of all these what has ultimately remained with him? He does not find an answer to any vital question. The novel ends on the note, that the only possession he is left with is the memory of his efforts to find an answer and the reconciliation he has made with himself. Somewhere, he would start his life afresh with Komali; that is also a possession which came to him when he least wanted it.

Generally the abridged version reads much better than the first edition. But I miss some very fine passages in it which were there in the earlier version, like the passage in the surrealist fashion embodying the confused thoughts of Nidhi when he goes to see Amritham after the death of his wife.

I hope I have conveyed to you at least the main features of this novel and given you a glimpse of its inner core. No amount of analysis is a substitute for reading the novel in its original language. I would feel gratified if I succeeded in creating enough interest in the novel that some of you might wish a translation of it were available in your own respective mother tongues.



## THE CRITICAL STUDY OF A MALAYALAM NOVEL: 'UMMACHU' BY UROOB

K. AYYAPPA PANIKER

THE first novel in Malayalam was written nearly eighty years ago. Some of our most gifted writers have devoted their energies to the writing of prose fiction and a few readable novels have been produced during this time. These novels, the most important of them written by O. Chandu Menon and C. V. Raman Pillai, bear witness to the vitality of our tradition in the art of storytelling. A new generation of novelists came into the field in the 1930's and 1940's but it took a long time for them to realize that the zest for social and political revolution was not enough to produce literary works. *Vishakanyaka* by S. K. Pottekkatt, *Pathumma's Goat* by Mohammed Basheer, *Chemmeen* by Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai and *Ummachu* by Uroob, however, indicate that the claims of art could not be suppressed for long by extra-literary considerations. But even these novels fail to come anywhere near the masterpieces of world literature. They do not merit any serious consideration if we apply international standards. It is difficult to say how they will fare in comparison with the outstanding products of fiction in other Indian languages.

One of the reasons for the shortage of good novels in Malayalam is perhaps the unhealthy and misguided controversies that went on in the 1940's and early 1950's among the writers. Political considerations loomed very large in their eyes. Bitter controversies vitiated the atmosphere. Several of them came to believe that a novel was a mere representation of everyday life as they conceived it and that the novelist has no need of craftsmanship. They expected from a work of fiction nothing more than an elaborate portrayal of contemporary life dominated by either class struggle or sexual perversion, or at times both. They also held the view that literature was a tool for social reform and often equated it with propagandist journalism. By the middle of the 1950's, however, the climate of literary opinion began to change and one of the first fruits of the new harvest in the field of fiction was *Ummachu* by Uroob. The importance of

this novel is partly historical and relative and not purely intrinsic or absolute. Its study therefore helps to bring into focus both the strength and weakness of fictional literature in Malayalam.

*Ummachu* was first published in book form in 1954. It became extremely popular when it first came out serially in *The Mathrubhumi Weekly*. It has retained its popularity to this day. It has also merited the acclaim of a substantial section of the most discerning critics in the language. Its instantaneous popularity was chiefly due to the fact that it provided a refreshing contrast to the kind of novels which had by then glutted the market. These were either cheap sentimental or melodramatic stuff or just unadulterated political journalism in the guise of novels in which the rich man was invariably the villain and the political agitator the hero. *Ummachu* helped to change the taste of the reading public by offering a new conception of the nature and function of literature in social life.

The novel derives its title from the name of its central character, Ummachu. But it is not the story of just one person, nor is the whole train of events perceived through her eyes only. Equal to her in importance are the three playmates of her childhood, with whose lives is inextricably involved her own life and whose good fortunes and misfortunes affect her almost as powerfully as they affect them. Beeran, Mayan and Chappunni—all the three seem to move on the circumferences of three concentric circles, each with a radius of a different length, with Ummachu herself at the centre. She exercises a terrible fascination on each of them and despite the joyous innocence of her childhood and the nearly superhuman will of her adult life, she draws each of them irresistibly into the vortex of her own tragic fate. Mayan falls in love with her and she reciprocates his love; but before they can do anything about it, it is Beeran, who also is in love with her, that manages to marry her with the help of her parents and with the timely intervention of Ahammedunni, the custodian and distributor of legends of local origin. Ummachu does not like it at all, but being a well-brought up girl in a Muslim family which is not quite well off financially, she meekly surrenders to the wishes of her father and mother and to the clever machinations of the local legend-vendor Ahammedunni. The news of Ummachu's



marriage with Beeran pains and shocks Mayan who in a fit of rage falls foul of Ahammedunni and beats him up. Fearing that the old man is done for as a result of his heavy blows, Mayan leaves the place, a sad, worried and frightened soul, perpetually pursued, so he believes, by the hounds of justice for his supposed murder of Ahammedunni. The runaway Mayan reaches Wynad, where by hard labour and shrewd saving he amasses a small fortune. When after Ahammedunni's death two years or so later, his son Hassan too takes to the hills of Wynad in search of a means of livelihood, Mayan learns from him that Ahammedunni did not actually succumb to his blows but died on account of some other illness. He is now free from the fear of pursuit by the police and goes on a visit to his home village. He has a casual meeting with Ummachu, who is now the mother of a boy and from her he learns that she is still devoted to him. The demon in him now scrambles to his feet and one night he stealthily breaks into her bedroom and murders her husband Beeran in cold blood. He returns to Wynad immediately to escape the arms of the law and there with the devoted assistance of Hassan makes himself rich. Time passes and Mayan gets news through Hassan that the responsibility for the murder of Beeran has been foisted on an innocent labourer.

While these fast-moving events were rocking the lives of Ummachu, Beeran and Mayan, Chappunni, the fourth member of that childhood fraternity, has been cautiously taking steps to revive the forgotten glory of his once-reputed family, now in total disintegration and decay. His skill in village-level litigation and management of finances has won for him the confidence of Ummachu and Beeran and at her insistence he accepts the management of their estates. With steady improvement in his fortunes, Chappunni Nayar gets married and recovers something of the lost reputation of his family. Even after the death of Beeran he continues to enjoy the confidence of Ummachu and hence it is Chappunni whom Hassan approaches on behalf of Mayan to put through the proposal for a marriage between Ummachu and Mayan. Chappunni is not unaware of Mayan's guilt, but knowing Ummachu's mind very well he has no difficulty in getting her consent for the marriage. Ummachu thus marries Mayan, who is the murderer of her first husband but who has also been her lover from childhood.



Abdu, Beeran's only son by Ummachu, is well looked after by his mother as well as his stepfather; but the unfortunate child grows up in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. His instinctive dislike of Mayan develops into bitter hatred and smoulders in his heart when little by little he learns that Mayan is the murderer of his father. His love for his mother also falls under a shadow, especially when she bears Mayan two sons, Marikar and Hydros. Like Hamlet he sulks, but no ghost summons him to action. Abdu is too refined to contemplate revenge in terms of blood for blood; he finds comfort and consolation in the household of Chappunni Nayar. When he goes to school, he escorts Chappunni Nayar's daughter Chinnammu. He develops an oppressive sense of loneliness at home. Mayan tries to win him over by love and tact. Ummachu too is greatly troubled at heart by the growing isolation of her first-born. They make a bold attempt to resolve the misunderstandings by calling on Abdu and discussing all matters with an open mind; but at the interview with Abdu, Mayan gets the shock of his life when he learns that Abdu knew him to be his father's murderer. Mayan too has considerably changed during these years; the quick-tempered man of action has by now become introspective and oppressed with a sense of guilt. With a sick heart he leaves for the forests of Wynad; but finding no peace of mind even on the hills and unable to resolve his moral dilemma, he hangs himself. When the dead body is brought home at the insistence of Ummachu, there is a moment of true terror and pity. At her bidding they remove the clothes from the face of the corpse and Ummachu takes a searching look at it, whispering the words, 'so you have raced ahead of me?'

Meanwhile Abdu's attachment to Chappunni Nayar's daughter Chinnammu develops into love in the fullness of time; and Chinnammu's interest in the politics of the Indian National Congress spearheading the struggle for freedom draws Abdu into the thick of an election fight. He is set up as the Congress candidate in opposition to his brother Hydros who has become the candidate of the Muslim League. Ummachu, who sides with Abdu against Marikar and Hydros at the partition of the family, now asks Chappunni Nayar, the sole surviving comrade of her childhood days, whose help she has sought from time to time in the face of dire emergencies, to lend his whole-hearted support to Hydros in the election. The election fight is carried on in the

grand manner of modern vulgarity, with processions and slogan-shouting and intrigue and counter-intrigue; but on the day of the polling, Chinnammu defies her father's instructions to vote for Hydros and casts her vote in favour of Abdu. Leaving her parents she goes over to live in Abdu's house and introduces herself to Ummachu as her son's wife. This unexpected turn of events shocks and pains the poor old woman and she feels she has committed an act of injustice and ingratitude to her lifelong friend Chappunni Nayar. The latter himself is broken-hearted; even the election victory of Hydros, whom he has been supporting actively, brings him no joy. When he calls on Ummachu, she asks his forgiveness on her knees. The hold of age-old prejudices on his mind is still firm and he finds it difficult to forgive his daughter and her husband even when a child is born to them. Ummachu herself withholds her blessings from the young couple who have thus disregarded the barriers of caste and creed in the fulfilment of their love through wedlock.

The most refreshing thing about Uroob's novel is that it is free from the cramping obsessions of socio-political ideologies. Even when he is deeply interested in the objectivization of a vision of life lighted up by humanist idealism, he appears first and foremost as an artist. Without surrendering the artistic integrity of his work, he is able to portray the inner and outer life of his characters. Having no extra-literary axes to grind, he affirms more than he rejects. Since his sympathies are as large as life itself, it is wrong to think of him as a senseless formalist. He sees life steadily and sees it whole and the vision of life he presents before us creates in us an awareness of its mystery which defies all oversimplification, and in which passions spin the plot and character is destiny. Uroob does not reduce life to any rigid formula; he is too honest to attempt that. And it is this freedom from any preconceived yet ill-digested abstraction about life that saves his work from cheap sentimentalism and obscurantist vulgarity.

Besides the four main characters whose fortunes make up the plot of UMMACHU in the main, we also get the full-size picture of the vicissitudes that beset the four families. Behind these four families, we have, of course, the larger social groups, their common endeavours like politics and scandal-mongering, their common beliefs and superstitions, and at the back of it all, the



tragic course of life that encompasses all and sundry. What the novel presents is in fact a microcosm of a village in Malabar; the author pursues not merely the activities of a few characters but the psychological under-currents at the lower depths, which in an uncanny way guide the destinies of all of us as powerfully as the Olympian gods guided those of the ancient Greeks. Uroob has resurrected what the realistic narrative in the name of so-called social realism had sacrificed from recent literature, especially from recent fiction, namely a concern with the deeper and more fundamental aspects of life.

Among the many striking features of the narrative technique adopted in *UMMACHU*, one may mention first the genuinely rustic humour which sparkles both in the descriptive passages and in the dialogues of the characters. It illumines the pathos of the more sombre parts of the book and is an essential part of the novelist's poetic vision of life itself. Yet another remarkable feature is the introduction of a character like Ahammedunni who retells the legendary origins of the different families in the village one by one. What he unravels is interesting primarily for their value as good fiction and not as truthful records of history. Their historical value is perhaps not to be ignored, but that is necessarily of secondary importance. Uroob's narrative style is seen at its best in such chapters as *The Hand That Killed The Nambudiri* and *The House Rocked By Whirlwind*. The hand that disposed of the Nambudiri Brahmin was that of Rarichan who belonged to the Sudra caste and after the murder of the Nambudiri he embraced Islam and adopted the name of Ismail; he was the great great grandfather of Mayan. These legends around the different families help to root the story in the fertile soil of the village itself and to fix its essentially rustic flavour. They also serve to provide a firm base on which each of the main characters is erected as if hewn out of primeval rocks. The influence of heredity on one's innate nature is clearly demonstrated here. The use of the class-cum-regional dialect has an added significance when viewed in this light.

Uroob has done remarkably well in characterization also. There is a certain freshness and authenticity about most of his characters. They are of the same stuff as their social milieu and hence there is seldom any impression of disharmony between character and setting. Flat types jostle against characters in the

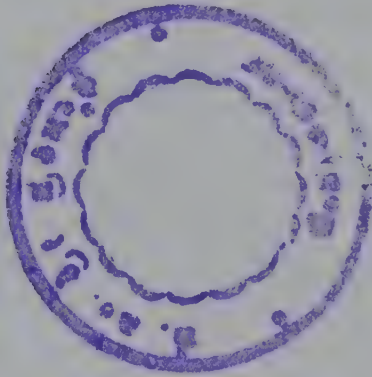


round; and they all seem to breathe freely and evolve and change under the pressure of circumstances. Beeran is a good foil to Mayan, whose character is conceived with real knowledge of human nature. From the murderer to the suicide is a far cry; but the whole distance is traversed by Mayan. To some readers, he may still appear repulsive because of his inborn taste for violence; to the novelist, however, as well as to the more sympathetic among readers, he is no monster but an erring soul with violence in his blood who does not deserve outright condemnation. But there is no doubt that among the characters in the novel it is Ummachu and Chappunni who stand out in clear profile. Though the exact nature of their relationship is not divulged by the novelist, their platonic attachment to each other never escapes our notice. Is it the fulfilment of their aspirations that we see in the marriage of Chinnammu and Abdu? We do not require a categorical answer to that question, but it is enough that such a thought passes through our minds.

Like a true novelist, Uroob has his eye fixed on details; without upsetting the total framework, he can find himself the leisure for close attention to the minute details. This gives the novel a certain amplitude and makes it a 'novel', as different from an extended short story. We are made conscious of the passage of time and its impact on characters and events. The manipulation of the time factor is one of the subtlest features of the craft of a novel and the author of *Ummachu* never lets himself neglect this point.

But when that much praise is given to this novel, it remains to be said that its flaws as a work of art are quite patent. The organization of the plot has been considerably weakened by considerations arising from its publication in a serial form. There is for instance a shift of focus from Ummachu and what happens to her to Chinnammu and Abdu and the problem of a Hindu-Muslim marriage. The political conflict between Abdu and his half brothers and the whole sequence dealing with the elections is not properly fused to the rest of the book. It appears to be out of tune with the main interest of the novel. Again, Mayan's repeated escapades into Wynad are not quite in keeping with the realistic character of the novel as a whole; they appear to be clever contrivances which fail to carry conviction to the reader. Certain incidents like the murder of Beeran and the suicide of

Mayan have an element of melodrama about them. But here we may also point out the canvas of the novel is large enough to disengage our attention from these aspects to the more salient features of the work. Above all, the author has a style of narration which carries a peculiar flavour about it and his narrative skill makes us overlook features that would otherwise look incongruous and even unaesthetic. His human and his delicate use of the local dialect cannot be brought out in a hasty translation into another language. His use of language is like that of a poet, yet his main concern is narration. This is a rare achievement among contemporary Malayalam novelists.



A CRITICAL STUDY OF 'POI THEVU'—  
FALSE GODS—A NOVEL IN TAMIL  
BY KA NAA SUBRAMANYAM

C. S. CHELLAPPA

THE novel I have taken up for a close critical study here is POI THEVU—(False gods) written by Ka Naa Subramanyam. Twelve of Subramanyam's novels have been published in book form so far, and I think that four or five of them yet remain in manuscript form yet unpublished. Ka Naa Subramanyam is a writer of short stories of distinction; he is also a critic. I think that POI THEVU is his best novel.

The novel deals with life in a village in the Thanjavur District in Tamilnad. It is set in Mettu Street (High Street), a street of lowclass people—low on the economic as well as on the social scale. The hero's father is a rowdy of great notoriety and his mother a virago. Somu the boy grows up into the respectable Somasundara Mudaliar and ends as Somu Pandaaram (Sanyasi). POI THEVU is the fictional biography of Somu. Before I set out to examine the various aspects of this novel, I shall summarise the events of the story very briefly—though such a summary will do great injustice to the novel.

Sattanur is a typical Tamil village. In it dwell all the usual castes and communities with their usual employments and occupations; their employment decides their psychology, their character, their culture. Even the streets are formed on communal lines as is usual with us. Individual and social interests, modified by their individual character, add to the good and bad points about the village which is mainly a secular community. Mettu Street also belongs to the village. Though known as High Street, the dwellers in the street are among the lowest in the social scale in Sattanur. They live by serving the other street dwellers in the village; when they are not working or compelled to work, they drink, quarrel among themselves, steal, threaten others and make a living of it; they indulge in all sorts of rowdyisms. Mothered by the virago Valliammai, gathered by a rowdy Karuppan, Somu



has the freedom of the village; he is brought up by his mother, having lost his father early. Even when young his experience of life in the village touches the frontiers of knowledge. Dreams, desires, ideals which are not yet well formed inform him and grow in his brain. Above all this money is a God whom he succumbed to from early onwards; he could guess at the extent of the power of money. His first desire was for a then popular redbordered dhoti which desire was fulfilled by pensioner Ranga Rao in whose house his mother is a servant and he himself takes service. His first desire fulfilled leads him to desire and to dream of more. Ranga Rao is a well-to-do charitable-minded landlord and when dacoits try to plunder his house, Somu the boy of eleven years is able to save Ranga Rao with some foresight and cleverness. And as a result of this he becomes almost a member in Ranga Rao's family.

Somu's desires and dreams are thus fulfilled but they give place to thousands more of desires. He desires to learn to read and write and learns the three R's for four years and then gives it up. After Ranga Rao and his wife die, Somu is encouraged and supported by their daughter Gangabhai and her husband Sambamurthi Rao. Somu's mother also dies. By the time he is twenty, he is sexually awake. He makes friends with Paappaathi who is older than him and is a widow with a child. Though it is now evident that in many things Somu is an exception in Mettu Street, he is also a product of it, as the villagers remark knowingly among themselves. From this time onwards, love of money as well as love of woman is the axis round which Somu's life revolves.

Afraid of the way Somu was tending, Sambamurthi Rao arranged a marriage for him with a girl called Meenakshi. But even that could not prevent Somu going his own way. He begins to drink as well. Nine years after giving birth to a boy called Natarajan, Meenakshi dies and Paappaathi the old love of Somu moves into his house, ostensibly to take care of the boy. They live like husband and wife. 'Karuppan's son—how can he be different?' was the verdict of Sattanur. Sambamurthi Rao and his wife out of gratitude for what Somu has done to their family give him the capital to start a small greedy store in the village.

Somu turns over a new leaf—once the grocery shop begins functioning. His ideal in life is now trade—making money

through trade. In a few years he wins the respect of the village which talks of him now as Somasundara Mudaliar; he has become one of the elite of the village. 'He is no ordinary fellow, this Somu of ours' every one in the village comments. Somu takes the initiative in arranging for a Railway halt at the village—he becomes a force in the public life of the community from that time onwards. 'Was he clever or was he only lucky and fortunate?' asked many. It was only too evident that whatever he touched prospered. He expanded his business and opened a branch in the nearby town of Kumbakonam. He had accounts in Banks; he learned to read and to write in English. He became what is called civilised in his manners by his friendship with Akkaraip Pillai who had been to Malaya and had made money and come back and settled down in Sattanur. They started a busroute jointly. Later Somu became an insurance agent and became a district agent with many field workers under him. He bought a car and learnt to drive it himself. So long he had been content with his house in Mettu Street but now he planned to build for himself a house in Kumbakonam Extension. He refused to become a landlord in Sattanur—it would tie him permanently down to Sattanur and Mettu Street. But he did not want to cut himself away from Mettu Street either; he did not want to dispose of that house. A fellow merchant from Madras tries to kindle in him a desire to live in a city, instead of in a small village.

Sambamurthi Rao's family is now on evil days running down-grade on the parallel lines of charity beyond one's means and mismanagement. Sambamurthi loses his wife and mental balance with the shock and begins to drink and to live a loose life in Thanjavur. Somu who pursues him to bring him back to sanity and Sattanur has occasion to compare himself with his erstwhile master and benefactor. He could sense that the Rao has spiritual resources on which he could fall back in the long run while Somu himself had none. He could follow easily the downward path of Sambamurthi but not his upward path when he set his feet firmly on it after a few weeks of straying. In his trip to Thanjavur to save Sambamurthi Rao, Somu, after nearly fifteen years of steady sex life with Paappaathi falls a victim to his desire for a dancing girl Baalaambaal who had been for a few weeks the acquaintance of Sambamurthi Rao. Rao has soon found himself and returns to Sattanur and to his religious routine of puja to



Panduranga in which he is able to drown finally his sorrows and his plight. Somu is lost in the trap which he himself has sprung. Money and lust rule him still and the moneymaking machine is in motion and Somu goes up a few more rungs in the ladder of success. In Kumbakonam Rangachari and his wife Komalavalli become Somu's friends—they are up to anything and generally unscrupulous—and he begins to drink again. His place in the public life of not only Sattanur but also Kumbakonam is now assured and he begins to don suits in Khaddhar under the direction of Komalavalli. As per the advice of Rangachari, he makes his chain of grocery shops into a Limited concern and becomes its Managing Director. At about this time he begins to be aware that his son Natarajan is a worthless fellow, a true scion of Mettu Street.

Just about this time Paappaathi also dies. And Sambamurthi Rao sets out on a pilgrimage to Pandaripuram, having nothing more to stay in Sattanur for. Somu feels that now is the time to win freedom and release from Mettu Street and Sattanur these two being absent. As the Kumbakonam bungalow is now ready, he moves into it. He brings and settles the dancing girl from Thanjavur Baalaambaal and her sister in an adjacent bungalow. And Komalavalli too is his dear and near friend. He is rolling in wealth; he has his desire of women. But in the midst of all this plenty, he receives information that Sambamurthi Rao had died at the feet of Panduranga in Pandaripuram. This unexpected news unsettles him a little.

But his God, Money sees to it that he recovers. But since his young early carefree days as a lad roaming the streets of Sattanur, Somu now finds the freedom to think basically about the things that matter. In the old days there were only unexpressible desires and dreams; now he gave way to poignant thought. A giant battle was being fought in his small brain. Sambamurthi Rao's death was only the first blow of the battle. Somu's son Natarajan's character was the second and final blow. The village of Sattanur claimed that it was a case of like father, like son. Somu had physically moved a long way from Sattanur and Mettu Street but both were evidently eternal realities for him inescapable; its characteristics pursued him in the shape of the acts of his son. He felt that he could never manage to get release from Sattanur or Mettu Street or his forbears. He felt weary; he



was physically and mentally tired but the money machine still turned bringing him more and more of it. He became a district agent for kerosene and then for petrol; he becomes even a patron of cultural activities. The coming of the Hitler war made the making of more money more easy. But the grocer was accused of having broken one of the rice ration rules and Somu came to a sudden stop, allowing himself time away from the making of money to think in earnest. He sees with his own eyes his son Natarajan making love to his dancing girl Baalaambaal; his eyes close at the atrocity of it but his mind awakens. He wills the major part of his property to the Sattanur temple, pleads guilty in court and is sentenced to jail for seven months and he accepts the sentence. When he comes out of jail after serving his term, he feels that he is at peace, at last free from Sattanur. He begins to hear in his mind's ear the Sattanur temple Bells—which he had heard often enough when young. He had a towel on his shoulders which he cast aside as one cloth too many and walked on with only four cubits of cloth round his waist; his body was weak and his mind was ripely heavy with thoughts. He walks in the direction opposite to that in which Sattanur lies. Some days pass and Somasundara Mudaliar who had now become Somu Pandaaram lies dead on a dusty street. He had reached another Sattanur—in that Sattanur also there is a Mettu Street. So ends the novel.

## II

That is the story.

There are two major reasons why I chose this novel for my study. Ever since the first novel appeared in Tamil nearly a century ago, many novels have been written including the serial stories which pass as novels today appearing week after week in our popular magazines, and of these many novels, POI THEVU stands apart, unique, different. My second reason is the consideration that to the art of fiction in Tamil this novel has made a distinct contribution.

POI THEVU was published in 1946 and was written a couple of years before. This is the author's second novel.

Of the Tamil novels before this date which I have read and which could be considered literary and of some merit, mention could be made of five or six,—not more. The Tamil short story is rich but the novel is not so rich; has have to be confessed.

Even up to the year 1965, I am afraid that there were not more than ten novels or twelve at the most that could be considered worth-while. That again makes it easy to fix the place of this novel in the Tamil novel tradition. B. R. Rajam Iyer's KAMALAAMBAAAL (towards the end of the 19th century) and Madhaviah's PADMAAVATHI (about the same period), K. S. Venkataramani's MURUGAN THE TILLER and KANDAN THE PATRIOT (both written first in English in the early thirties and then rendered into Tamil), Va Raa's SUNDARY (about the same period), Shanker Ram's MANNAASAI (LOVE OF DUST first written in English and rendered into Tamil towards the close of the thirties) and R. Shanmugasundaram's NAA-GAMMAAL (early forties) these were the only worth-while novels available to the Tamil reader in the period before POI THEVU. Though PRATHAAPA MUDALIAR by Vedanayakam Pillai preceded all these novels (having appeared in the sixties of the last century) it was merely a chronicle, a romance and has no great merit of the literary genre called the novel, and so I have not included it in my list of worth-while novels which preceded POI THEVU.

Rajam Iyer was a vedantin; his purpose in writing his novel was, in his own words,

to portray a peaceless soul caught in the coils of this mortal world and troubles by many vicissitudes finally achieving a calm sweet haven—this progress from storm to calm is my purpose.

Madhaviah said of his novel:

The implications of my tale are to be pondered on by readers and such conclusions as they arrive at for social progress are to be implemented and pursued. If my readers would think deeply of the social evils portrayed in this novel, I would consider myself amply rewarded.

It is obvious that Madhaviah was interested in social reform. K. S. Venkataramani too had a social purpose and wrote of patriotism, the fight for freedom, economic prosperity etc. Va Raa pleaded for widow remarriage. Shanmugasundaram's canvas was small. Whatever the purpose of these novels, these too have a literary appeal and they do not lack the form, the harmony, the expression and the art of fiction. These novels made further



development in the novel in Tamil possible. We can observe of these novels in general that they have as their base domestic and social problems. Philosophical, social and economic reformist purposes have been the fundamental issues with which they come to grips. They are moulded by influences outside of themselves and to extraneous, not merely artistic impacts necessitated by the novels themselves; they yield to the needs of the hour and the milieu; the situations and the action in these novels are conditioned by something extraneous to them and not intrinsic. I have also to add another thing; their themes take into consideration only an arc of life; they do not come full circle. Their range is to that extent limited.

But POI THEVU is a novel which comes full circle. It describes the whole circle and does not rest satisfied with the portrayal of a broken arc. It has a purpose which is much larger than that thought of by the above mentioned novelists as we can well see for ourselves from the subject handled, from the material selected. The novelist in this case has succeeded in portraying his hero Somu—in his comparing himself with another man and feeling that he has not yet become a full complete man. The novelist has portrayed Somu as a full and complete man but who felt himself incomplete. Somu Mudaliar is the hero of an epic; POI THEVU is cast in the epic mould. When you lay down the book after reading it, you feel the completion, the full satisfaction you experience when you read the *Ramayana* or the *Silappadhikaram*. The reason is not far to seek; it is because of the completion as a full rounded figure that Somu achieves in the novel. It is not merely because Somu is described from his birth to his death, in all detail, in all his ups and downs. A whole life is depicted in its fulness, a personality fully emerges the objective and subjective reactions to conditions as and when they arise are fully detailed; the conflicts as they arise are fully told; the awareness born of these conflicts, the personal and individual attitudes which condition Somu's whole life, leading on to a crescendo in which the whole dissolves and finds its end are adequately and fully expressed. The hero is possessed of devils but he had believed that he was possessed by the Gods and when he falls we see a Titan fall. But the moment he falls, he is up again; we see, he has risen and he is upright again. Sent to jail as having infringed the rice ration rules, his son's acts and passions



are, materialistically considered, his fall; in his renunciation of the second piece of cloth as one too many and in his leaving his property to the temple at Sattanur is the spiritual rising of Somu.

But Somu is no tragic hero. He is not a character who has fashioned his own destiny. When he was born he had nothing to lose. He was born with all the defects and faults of a character peculiar to Mettu Street. Somu's life-view was defective when he thought of his defects as his virtues. As Ka Naa Su says in the novel itself: 'Somu Mudaliar was selfgenerated (Thanthonri; swayambhu); he was a tree without roots. Miraculously the tree put out brilliant foliage, flowers and fruits. Whatever was his for the moment was to his credit and profit—it was on that principle that he lived. The total casting of accounts comes towards the end when he tries to assess his profit and loss. So his death when he was nearly sixty years of age on the streets as Somu Pandaaram is not a tragic end. When he cast aside his towel as one cloth too many to possess, Somu Mudaliar had cast his profit and loss account to the winds and become a full man, a complete man. The storm is over; he is at peace with himself; he has achieved rest and fulness. The narration of his death is only a factual matter after that, no matter of great importance though artistically necessary.

The purpose and theme of this novel is to depict the pilgrimage of a man who leads a completely materialistic life and arrives at a spiritual end. Thus it reverses and states otherwise the purpose of Rajam Iyer in his novel as stated by himself: 'the progress of a peaceless soul caught in the coils of this mortal world and troubled by many vicissitudes achieving a calm sweet haven'. The novel POI THEVU has for its theme 'the soul born in ignorance, lacking the discipline to know what is the happy haven. It follows many false gods, flowers in man worldly swamps and eddies, goes in the wrong rut till almost the end but when at last face to face with reality, achieves a calmness—a stasis—a beyondness—virakthi. It is this experience that POI THEVU portrays. The author remarks in his Preface:

To state some truths and principles by which men can live,  
the story of this modern man Somu served me greatly.

Since Somu could not base himself on truth or basic values, he had to lead a negative life, which he thought of as a positive ideal.

In his Preface to *Tess* Thomas Hardy indicates the significance he attaches to his theme by quoting Shakespeare:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods;  
They kill us for their sport.

Ka Naa Subramanyam indicates in his Preface the lines from a Tamil Saint, Manikkavachaka in his *Tiruvachakam*:

This is my God; this my God; No this is my God  
Prate of many false Gods the men of this world.

The words POI THEVU—False gods that occur in these lines give him his title. The author says further in his Preface:

Man today is in need of a God—he cannot live without Him. Even he who talks atheism 'till his tongue is scarred with Godlessness' needs a God of his own variety. And what is more, one God does not seem to be enough for us—one God does not satisfy; we seem to need many Gods. Every moment of our life we need a different God—this is no exaggeration. The God of this moment becomes a false God the next moment.

Every moment of his life Somasundara Mudaliar had been creating false gods of his own and living accordingly. His worship of these false gods is his life. He says in a particular context in the novel:

I think that if we have to worship and offer archana to a God, we should all do that to our money boxes and Bank Passbooks. We should not go to the temples to offer worship to the Gods that dwell therein. Can you tell me, Sir, whether there is any other God in the world? Money is the only God we see with our eyes and handle with our hands. Those who say that there are other gods are liars—they are fools, madmen. They dare not worship the true God but humble themselves before false gods. Not only do they create these false gods but they offer them worship as well.

The Gods of the temple were false gods to Somu. His money and the pleasures it brought him were real. Even when young, even though his ears heard the temple bells of Sattanur ring, his eyes did not register the image in the sanctum sanctorum,

in spite of the fact that the idol was before him constantly. He was hankering after the small paisa coin which was not available to him at that date. Later he could catch with his mind's ears the jingle to small coins in his savings box; he could conjure it up any time he pleased. When at the end of his life this worshipper of Mammon had to cast accounts and draw the last balance sheet it cannot be said whether he arrived at the conclusion that the temple Gods were the real Gods—though we can hazard a guess because of the fact that he gave away his property to the Sattanur temple. One thing is certain; that he had arrived at the conclusion that hitherto he had been worshipping only false gods. But this dawning of wisdom cannot in any way help him; he is at the end of his tether; he was on the edge of the further shore; he cannot return and make or order anew his life. So he has to die as Somu Pandaaram. Before he dies he tells a fellow Pandaaram:

The Gods are not merely thirty three crores in number.

Thirty three crores of thirty three crores of Gods exist.

There are as many gods as there are moments from the dawn of the first day to this in the world. For future moments too there are Gods, one God to each moment to every man.

The fellow Pandaaram who listens to this cannot draw any sense out of this. But we who have been following Somu moment after moment with his false god after false god can catch the significance of this statement. Every moment of life is a new life for man. His desires, dreams, ideals, change and are reborn and take new shapes every moment of his life. They are born, change, disappear, and are reborn. In the author's words in the Preface:

Man's desires, dreams, ideals, many formless thoughts and images should all be called gods.

This is an ironical comment on the way we live today and our mental equations. In this ironical sense Somu worships his dreams, desires, ideals, formless thoughts as his gods and follows them to their logical end. He could not find out which was the one true God in this welter of gods. That there could be one other and true God was not in his faith—not only for Somu but for all men of today this would be the truth.



## III

Having talked at some length about the material of this novel, it is time now to enquire how this material is ordered into a good novel, a work of fiction. Every artist has a manner and a method of his own. Literary form alone can make any material however good significant or enjoyable. How the writer orders his material so that the significance and the values underlying are accentuated artistically, how technically the form is made to emerge, makes for our appreciation of a work of art. It is essentially the form born of technical skill that makes us recognise a novel as a good worth-while artistic piece of work and apprehend its quality. Without the form and the technique which create the form we cannot distinguish between one novel and another. All the material detailed in the last section could be found and used in a biography or a drama—it may not have even become or been made literary. The author could have written a textbook of philosophy on the lines indicated. How does this material become a novel, a literary work in POI THEVU—that is the next question I shall take up.

In shaping this material Ka Naa Subramanyam follows the traditional methods in telling a story. Among his predecessors in the Tamil novel, he has not followed the method of Rajam Iyer or Madhaviah starting with a given situation in the middle of the story and unravelling the plot to the end. He has followed the earlier Vedanayakam Pillai, in beginning even before his hero is born. But Vedanayakam Pillai writes an 'I—novel' (autobiographical); Ka Naa Su has made his novel biographical. I shall have to add that like the epic poet Kamban, he begins in the orthodox, conventional sthalapurana, avathara descriptive manner. Mettu Street (High Street), Avathara (Birth), The Boundaries of Sattanur, From the Banks of the River Cauveri are the titles of his opening chapters—the titles make the content clear. The village is described in full; the various streets, the families that live in them, heritage, ways of life, the importance of the River Cauveri in the village life and economy are described in great and memorable detail. The hero as a child and as a boy and his various adventures are delineated with great deliberation. In many novels—in almost all novels in fact—the place, village, street, geography, condition of life etc., would be depicted only as far as

was necessary to create the setting of the novel. But I shall have to say that the way Ka Naa Su depicts the course of the River, the way the villagefolk live, the village geography and its cultural background is such as to impress upon the reader that Somu is a son of his soil, heir to all this—it is this which shapes Somu into what he is, seems to be the inescapable implication in the author's description. The reader becomes aware of them at first as unrelated facts but later as material related in and through Somu. The Sattanur Cauveri is described in an entire chapter—in all its range through all the hours of the day and the seasons of the year; it is imaged as a symbol of the life of Somu, running towards an end, ever new and every moment new and different.

In the RAMAYANA it is Rama that is solely important; in SILAPPADHIKAARAM it is Kannagi and Kannagi alone. In a like manner POI THEVU has only one character—Somu alone. In the other two epics we might succeed in finding one or two minor characters at least. But in POI THEVU we see no one other than Somu. The other characters in the novel only are there to accentuate the figure and personality of Somu. A rootless tree which put on foliage, flowers and fruits and then dried and stood leafless, bare and dry—this is the complete image in the novel for imaging which all other details are made to come into existence. All the information given, all details massed are secondary to this image and make it possible; in this selectivity of detail, excluding everything else but Somu as unnecessary, the author's effectiveness far surpasses the skill of any other novelist in Tamil before him.

The narrative of the story is also attempted in the third person by the narrator in a traditional storytelling manner. But the success of Ka Naa Su's method and technique is that in the course of the narration he has transferred the 'I' of Somu to every reader. The narrator follows the thoughts of Somu closely indeed. And as he does not deal with incidents and situations but concentrates on the thoughts or the stream of thoughts of Somu, this technique is thoroughly successful. Because of this technique in narration, there are very few conversations in the novel. Somu the boy, Somasundara Mudaliar the successful man and Somu Pandaaram between them speak only on very few occasions. The reader has not heard his voice at all. At the close of the novel we are familiar with the form, the thoughts, the very life of



the hero in all its details, his personality but we have not heard him speak at all. This again I shall have to say—that in no other Tamil novel do we come across so few conversations to carry on the story.

There is another new feature that I have to note regarding the telling of the story. The narration does not depend on episodes or situations to carry on the story—except in the one instance where Somu the boy saves Ranga Rao's property from being carried away and looted by the dacoits. Episodes are narrated from a distance—they just come in to mould the figure and personality of Somu. No scenes are actually described in this novel. If the life of Somu covering some sixty years was written in an episodic manner, the novelist could have written well over a couple of thousand pages. If as Somu Pandaaram said moments are given importance this novel would have grown in such a way that even the *Mahabharatha* would have been dwarfed. The author attempts through a new and effective technique to suggest the episodes, the incidents, the various situations in the hero's life. Somu's life up to his eleventh year is described in detail for 157 pages. In the section entitled 'Interlude' which succeeds the first part, in 25 pages the author surveys thirty years of Somu's life. At the end of the first part Somu has joined the establishment of Ranga Rao as a servant and he is eleven years old. In the first chapter of the second part which begins after the Interlude Somu is forty one years of age and is the proprietor of the grocery stores in Sattanur and bids fair to become an important person in the social community of Sattanur. In any narration there are bound to be time intervals but the skill of the writer consists in suggesting the interval as a sort of a continuous growth process. It should never become a break or a lag in time. The even tenor of the hero's life in POI THEVU is ably suggested by the author in the sections entitled Interludes of which there are two in the novel covering long stretches of time in the life of Somu. The Interludes are rapid surveys somehow producing the fullness and impression of moment to moment narration. The content of these two Interludes can be classified as the stream of the thoughts of Somu, comment on them and information carrying forward the stretch of years; the sections fall into a harmonious whole and do not distract the readers' attention from the main narrative or its pace. This



is a masterly achievement, making possible the fullness of the novel and the architectonics of the novel.

#### IV

I have to say something here about the attitude which the author has towards emotion and intellect in ordering his material in this novel. The plot of a novel is not merely its theme or story. To make of a story or a theme a novel, the novelist has to so order his separate parts as to suggest effectively what he wants. In this we should examine the ordering of various considerations which lead to certain conclusions within the novel, various passions, values and the feelings resultant thereon. In ordering these feelings a creative writer has to be very careful not to over emotionalise or sentimentalise the material at his command. It is easy in the Indian context to give rise to sentimentality in dealing with situation and character. But feeling is also of prime essence—without it the novel would be flat, weary and unprofitable. In this sense we believe that Aristotle's idea of Catharsis should help the writer to make fine and refine the sentiment in his work.

Ka Naa Subramanyam is no exception in believing that sentiment or passion has its place in a work of art—it is a basic element. His hero in POI THEVU is a man of sentiment and passion certainly. But Ka Naa Subramanyam has faith in what he calls Emotional Stasis. Sentiment and emotion are things to be weighed in a fine balance by the creator and used; if a thousandth part of a grain is over, it might lead to sentimentality and pathos. In the case of a few writers otherwise of great merit, we see this happening. And in a highly emotional state, to get at the reality behind the emotion is difficult. When sentiment or passion is rampant, intellect refuses to function. When emotion or high sentiment is in a state of stasis the intellect can begin to function at an artistic level. Ka Naa Subramanyam is one of those who believes that it is only when a work of art is created on the basis of emotional stasis, with the intellect fully functioning that the work of art acquires a larger and completer significance. With this theory behind him, he is doubly careful not to make Somu Mudaliar a sentimental character or to be sentimental about him. So the novel is not told from the point of view of the sentiment or feeling but of the intellect. The emotions in any given chapter or occasion in the novel do not emerge; they are only in the background.

The emotion is hinted at but never presented. In regard to sentiments in the novel throughout, the author attempts understatement and sometimes oblique statements. As regard the theory of emotional stasis, I am not able to go all the way with Subramanyam, but as far as the stasis is worked out in this novel, I shall have to confess that it is quite effectively done, and without any loss to the emotional content—the hinting at the emotion which does not emerge is extremely skilfully done and is effective and is in keeping with the whole objective presentation of the novel.

The author does not present any scene from the point of view of sentiment or emotion as has already been said. Money and sex rule the life of Somu but even when he succumbs to them there is no direct presentation of them. It is an episode reflected upon, told in a few words excellently and with due emphasis. While Ka Naa Su can ably describe Mettu Street, the River Cauvery and other haunting places in the village each in its place in the novel with sufficient imagination and impressiveness he passes over mental states or descriptions of psychological states of mind—because they do not interest him for purposes of this novel. The impact of the mental state is more important to him than a description of an actual state of mind. From the beginning to the end of the novel the impact of incidents, situations, relationships, desires, aches, dreams, conflicts, circumstances opportunities on Somu Mudaliar is described; how they shaped him into what he was, how he reacts to them individually, totally and as a personality is narrated single-mindedly. Somu lives, grows and ripens before our eyes. Somu is not allowed to stand at any moment of crisis in the novel, at any crisis of sentiment or feeling; he just goes on. We always see him as a man come to a decision after a conflict; the author does not care to present him at moment of conflicts. We do not follow the acts of Somu through his mind; we know his acts first and then take cognizance of his mind, and follow it backward.

That a man should order his life through his intellect, not through his sentiment or feelings, through his mind and not through his heart is a basic faith as far as Ka Naa Su the author of this novel is concerned. As he himself says:

The life of a typical modern man like Somu gave me the opportunity of talking about some of the basic truths underlying our life.



He has attempted to portray Somu intellectually not emotionally; the novel is completely the thought or stream of thought of Somu; but Somu is nothing if not an intellectual projection of an image, thinking the author's thoughts. In this Somu is a stylised presentation—a doll going through the genuflexions artistically, in an effective manner. The technique of the Inter-ludes also accentuates the emphasis on the intellectual presentation and the author's stylisation of the hero.

Somu becomes Somu Mudaliar, then Somu Pandaaram and dies. We see a stream of thought starting when he is but five years old and culminating some fifty odd years later. In spite of the intervals in which he tries not to think and resists thinking, Somu is primarily a thinking man. Even his all-engrossing attempts at making money though they absorb him completely do not give him the freedom from thinking that he craves—the freedom from his inmost thoughts. Even his making money was the result of his thoughts—of his capacity to think. Torn between his thoughts, he tries to escape them.

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There was no one to compete with him. In his thoughts he was engaged always about himself—all the twentyfour hours of the day

says the author in the text of the novel at a particular turning point in Somu's life. There was a defect in his stream of thought. He could follow each of his thoughts and change the tenour of his life to suit it but he lacked a spiritual basis for his whole thinking and life, he lacked the requisite discipline and a sense of direction imposed on it. Why, what for were questions that always eluded him—he never even thought of asking himself these two questions. He was driven by an irresistible torrent—it was not amenable to discipline—the defect was in his birth in Mettu Street. He never strove to canalise his thoughts into predetermined paths and channels for particular desired ends.

In brief, Somu lacked a moral and a spiritual background. He did not inherit moral or spiritual values in his blood or heart being born of Karuppam and Valliammai in Mettur Street. But will a moral or a spiritual basis make of man a better person would be a legitimate question to ask. But it could have disciplined Somu's thoughts to some purpose the author seems to imply.



There is another thing also to be said here. Somu Mudaliar was so circumstanced, so conditioned that he was compelled to think about many things. Since he had no fixed fundamental basis of values for his thinking, no values and reference points, his values shifted from moment to moment. Anything that happened affected him—and the affecting being real, he revalued his values and accepted them at new face value; this revision of values was a continuous process for Somu Mudaliar till he comes out of jail. His idea of progress consists in reconciling the latest happening to the immediate value. He steered himself by the moment and his life was full of great and genuine moments. This kind of progress is not real progress that this was so was an idea that did not dawn on him till the very end when it was too late to turn back and salvage his life. This could not have led to peacefulness or fulness or satisfaction, but Somu was not aware of it. A man of thought, a really unthinking man of thought who was also a man of action is a truly effective character whom we meet in this novel of Ka Naa Subramanyam. He is a symbol of modern manhood who shows the way modern man is tending.

## V

I would like to point out how this piece of fiction is related to reality, how it reflects life. A quotation from Bonamy Dobree about the relation between art and life will be helpful in my analysis:

Now everybody is agreed that a work of art, even the most rambling novel, is not the same thing as life; it is something like life. But what makes it distinct from life is its pattern. Character unavoidably is part of the pattern, but since art is not life, pattern symbolises something for the writer. It may symbolise in the main one of two things: either life is like that or people are like that. Good art is always cut off from life; the figures do not exist in our time, they live in a time of their own; their space is less circumscribed than our own. As in all figures of great art, however solid they may be there is something aerial and intangible in them.

I accept this position completely. The realistic relation between life and POI THEVU can be only on this basis. The story

as well as the character are after all symbols. Somu Mudaliar is a symbol—POI THEVU is a novel which images a symbol. That men like Somu Mudaliar would act like Somu in the novel will be all that we can point out about the faithfulness to life in this novel of Ka Naa Subramanyam. It is likely that we do not meet the actual counterparts of Somu Mudaliar or the plot of POI THEVU in actual life. We can try to assess the probability and the possibility with regard to a work of fiction with actual life and actual happenings. Art and life can be only related in so far as they can suggest similarity between them and POI THEVU amply suggests and implies the similarity.

The author himself says in his Preface to the novel that 'There are those amongst us who think of men like Somu Mudaliar as their ideal, as their God'. This implies to a certain extent that the author himself had been thinking of Somu Mudaliar as a symbol—at least to those who think of him as an ideal to be emulated, as a god to be looked up to. To this extent POI THEVU may be said to reflect faithfully the life around us. Somu Mudaliar's thoughts and actions are so realistically delineated that when the reader meets a man in a similar situation he can cry out 'Ah here is Somu'. There are only a few novels in the Tamil language which achieve this sort of reality. Among them POI THEVU, it can be safely asserted, occupies the first and foremost place.

## VI

This novel is one which adds something to our tradition. Because of the Western impact our thought processes are somewhat misdirected now; and because of the current world situation, we seem to be floundering or flourishing in a confused state. The values that were root causes in our way of life have been displaced; new values have not yet sprouted, put forth leaves or buds. Accepting on trust conclusions based on other peoples' experiences, not having experienced in our own blood and heart those things that would lead us to similar or the same conclusions, we lag behind as camp followers or as suburbanites in a world stream of thought. Even our writing tends to follow other peoples' lead. At this juncture POI THEVU sounds a note of warning.

I have debated within myself whether Somu Mudaliar is perhaps not an existentialist. But no. An existentialist by definition is one denying objective universal values and holding that a man can create values for himself through action and by living each moment to the full'. Somu Mudaliar is not one who is aware of the old values—nor does he reject them consciously. He was misled by false values, decided by each moment. He did not choose—he did not have the capacity to choose. He was an ignoramus really regarding values—hence the values changed for him as often as circumstances changed. What was serviceable he accepted at the moment as supremely right. He is a mere materialist—not an existentialist. The novel POI THEVU insists upon the acceptance of a spiritual purpose in living as against a mere material purpose. In one of the Interludes the author says:

If only man could think conclusively about all the problems that are likely to confront him in life and then begin to live putting into practice his conclusions, how wise we should consider him, it would seem that the idea of the gurukulam course of old was this—that before one begins to live, one comes to conclusions, decisions and lives according to them. The ways of life would have crystallised at least in one's thoughts before one left school; one need never hesitate which way one should go. A man who debated to the end which way he should turn as each way offers to him is not likely to go anywhere or any distance.

Somu when young did not have any schooling as he did not have a guru or a gurukulam to attend. He stumbled all the way into life and at every step thought 'so this is life. This is life, so this is it'. He followed the turns that happened before him turning a number of corners without pre-determination or will of his own. He followed from one important moment into another important moment.

POI THEVU insists, it seems to me, on an acceptance of our traditional values—it tries to add a new significance to them—a new dimension to our traditional philosophical accepted values.



## VII

So far as I know POI THEVU is a highly original novel. In its techniques, in the manner of telling, we might be able to detect the impact of the West. But the theme, the content and the significance of this novel is Indian—it belongs to us. In the same manner this is to be considered a pioneering attempt among Tamil novels. I am not able to estimate its position in the world of the Indian novel. I cannot say—and I am sure that many among you also cannot say anything definite about it till other Indian language novels are made available to us. I am not sure how long it will take for us to transcend the limitations imposed on us by our own non-acquaintance with the other Indian languages. I shall not try to measure this novel against what are called the masterpieces of world fiction. It is not possible for me. The tradition in the novel differs from one language to another, from one country to another. And standards are not the same. A common measure seems impossible of achievement at this juncture. But this I can say—that POI THEVU is an outstanding significant Tamil novel of great literary merit. I get the same artistic satisfaction, the same literary experience by reading POI THEVU as I get by reading some of acknowledged fiction masterpieces of the world.

I do not know whether I have succeeded in placing before you a little part of what I myself experience when I read POI THEVU. The only thing that I can add would be to say that you should read the novel for yourself!

## A NOTE ON THE PROBLEM OF SIMPLIFICATION

RAJEEV TARANATH

ONE of the more important ways in which the West influenced India lies probably in the expansion of sensibility of the Indian writer, specially of the Indian writer in English. In terms of genre it made Nehru's and Nirad Chaudhuri's autobiographies possible. It made a host of novels possible.\* Probing further, we see it brought in new areas of feeling to the Indian sensibility. One can cite the novels of Narayan in their subdued and sustained humour as an instance of the last. To a largely conclusion-orientated people, it introduced a new quantity of perceiving and letting remain an element of uncertainty. Using routine literary terms we can say that Western influence was responsible for focusing the attention of the Indian writer on characters and their inter-animations as individuals. A remarkable amount of sophistication along this line has probably been achieved by the contemporary Indian women writers of fiction in English. But I think, the crucial point of this influence is to be found in the expatriate Indian using English as his creative medium and coming back to India or at any rate groping towards the 'Indian' for his imaginative sustenance. Such an expatriate, it would be logical to expect, would be working at the point where the impact of the West on the Indian sensibility is at its most intense. He could, in fact, be considered as a test case. Raja Rao of *The Serpent and the Rope* offers a very important test case. His novel is an indication of how much has been done and what has not been done in Indian writing in English.

I had better be brief about the things that Mr Raja Rao can do as a creative artist, since *The Serpent and the Rope* is undoubtedly a considerable creation. It is of a kind which can be termed major for its distinguished exploration into human relationships. The task is especially difficult in this novel for two reasons. The racial and the cultural mixture which is its matrix could force a less intelligent writer to deal with types. The fact that he utilises racial and cultural intersensitizations while

still concentrating on the individual is a rare achievement. The second reason is an outcome of the first. Partially, it helps him to pose the possibilities of human relationships in areas and in contours which are probably rare again.

The novel also shows, as perhaps no other Indian novel in English shows, that English handled by an Indian can cover a truly wide range of experience (It is a moot point whether some area of limitations found among Indian novelists could not be traced back to their language sensibility limitations. Narayan and the lower middle-class, contemporary women novelists and the upper middle-class could be stimulating combinations to explore). It also offers various levels of sensitivity in the handling of English, always shaping the syntax to many hierarchies of a particularly Indian awareness (as a general instance, consider any passage centering round woman; you find observations ranging from the highly imaginative to a kind of preciousness based on Indian dialectic). However, the importance of *The Serpent and the Rope* lies, I think, partially outside a purely linguistic achievement, distinctive though it is. It possesses a significance which coheres more to a substantial exploration in depth of certain rare aspects of the human psyche than to any achievement predominantly linguistic. It does have some acutely self-conscious writing through which the minute convolutions of emotion are traced. Nonetheless, the total achievement is of a more basic kind mentioned above. Mr Raja Rao's peculiar circumstance as novelist has a lot to do with this fact.

I should like to deal mostly with the use of language by Mr Raja Rao and cognate problems. This is a minor consideration when one thinks of his novel as a whole. But it is crucial from the point of view of the problems that the density of multi-cultural experiences create and of the relation between sensibility and sustained exposure to a multi-lingual contact. I come to the problem that a novel of this sort arranges itself into. It is broadly a problem of simplification. The rest of this paper is devoted to a discussion in brief of the kinds of simplification found in *The Serpent and the Rope*.

Before going into details, I might venture a general explanation of what I am trying to say. The expatriate writer is naturally placed in a position far away from the details of normal cultural stimuli. Being far away from the context which strengthens him



spiritually, he is forced to rely on memory which gives progressively diminishing flash-backs, resulting in increasing frequencies of the *highlight*. The necessity for response to such intermittent stimulus is urgent and therefore simplified.

The attempt to relate almost every valuable experience to an Indian context—the forms it takes are many—shows fairly clearly the process of the most challenging kind of simplification. I say challenging because this implies two things: (a) a sudden impatience at the slowness of the crisis-occurrence in a subtle and delicately elaborated structure and (b) a resultant forcing of the crisis by short circuiting the local process—a comparatively inferior ‘content’ replaces what could be a rich amalgam of experience structure. Consider the following passage:

... there opposites, begirt in her isle of existence, is the Mother of God, to whom man has built a sanctuary, a convocation of stone, uttered truly as never before. For it was the Word of God made actual, . . . that raised layer after layer of that white intimacy of thought, . . . I might have led a cow to her altar had I been in Benares (pp. 53-54).

What we see here is a very sensitive elaboration of a subtle experience, deft in the creation of new points of precision (‘intimacy of thought’). The last sentence attempts to settle this build-up into a holy-sacred context—elaborated throughout the novel. The result: an immediate lowering of creative tension, born out of the patently ‘Indian’ content. What is most unfortunate here is that the process immediately preceding the last sentence is also uniquely Indian in sensibility, in terms of the semi-fanciful relation in which the experient puts himself with the divine.

A variation is to be found in the thinning out of a local experience in order to make it sound right for Rama, who has a weakness for ‘Sanskritised’ syntax. The passage below is an instance:

Discovery is a whisper to oneself, and the night of love is an embalmment, a holiness that we place outside of time, in the knowledge that creation is truth (p. 135).

Here is a stage by stage deterioration in the freshness of experience. There are many abstractions, but the beginning still retains a kind of condensation. This is probably due to the considerable pressure of the unsaid which leaves the articulate, categorical

statement with a lot of resilience. But from this intense locus there is an attempt to bring the local exquisiteness into an overall and familiar pattern relying on the 'timeless', 'holiness' and the like. The power of the unsaid finds itself diluted into the rudimentarily said. A similar instance is to be found on page 129.

She (Savithri) could be filled with silence, and a steadiness filled the air then, as though the world was made real because one never saw it. This explained why Savithri so often closed her eyes, and then when she spoke, it was as if she spoke to the me that I did not know, but the me indeed, the only one, which hearing did not hear, seeing did not see, and knowing did not know but was knowledge itself.

The process of deterioration towards what are rather familiar syntactical signals is evident.

There are other ways, more obvious and hence comparatively less significant in which the functioning sensibility attempts to particularize its perceptions, jumping essential experience growths. Here are some of them: (a) *A combination of the exotic traditional Indian image and specialised attitude:*

Like one of our own mothers, Ganga, Mother Ganga has sat by the ghats, her bundle beside her. What impurity, Lord, have we made her bear.

I sang the *Gangastakam* again. (p. 35)

(the chant appears to be a technique of emotional escalation.) A similar instance is to be found on pages 37 and 38 with the accent on a 'special' attitude.

The whole of the Gangetic plane is one song of saintly sorrow, as though Truth began where sorrow was accepted, and India began where Truth was acknowledged . . . Truth is the Himalaya, and Ganges humanity.

Again,

Someone behind and beyond all living things gave us the touch, the tear, the elevation that makes our natural living so tender.

The softening implied in any simplifying process, is evident here. It seeks to replace the need for experience by the need for something much more easily available. (The simplification found here, is

of a kind, which affects sensibility by altering and by simplifying its needs.)

(b) *Loaded terms*: the recurrent Brahmin theme (e.g. pp. 46, 57, 68 and 344), sometimes in combination with touch and holiness quantities.

(c) *Sentiment* carried to extremes ranging from an intimacy with mythical names ('Little Mother was very sad . . . To learn English is easy, . . . But to say "Rama-Sita Krishna-Govinda" it takes many lives'. p. 270), to a level which is somewhat naive. Consider for instance, Rama's realization that 'For man, woman was anonymous' and hence 'clean or messy, I offered all my thoughts to Savithri, cleaned my mouth and went to bed'. This and the consequent responses are an upshot of her having told Rama that she had 'refused to gargle or wash' her mouth in order to preserve his 'perfume', asserting 'I'm a Hindu woman after all, my lord'. The whole episode illustrates the failure in function of a usually reliable element, here, a very tender, ancient, and peculiarly Hindu man-woman relationship.

(d) *The use of syntax*, intended to convey some feelings specially Indian in contour. It can be split into two important sub-divisions.

(1) *The aphorism*, usually occurring at the end of a paragraph:

Holiness is happiness. Happiness is holiness.

That is why a Brahman should be happy. (p. 24)

And sound is born of silence. (p. 36)

He who possesses Sanscrit can possess himself. (p. 37)

There's holiness in happiness, and Shakespeare was holy because Elizabeth was happy. Would England not see an old holiness again? (p. 201)

These are only a few stray instances. The first and the fourth bring out a very interesting point. To begin with, they use very faithfully the habit of inversion, followed by a quick jump to the conclusion, which is the relish of a certain age-group all over the country. In both, the conclusions are hasty and logically, failures. But the fact that such a failure is transferred into English is, if you like, an ambivalent success. If there is a gap between the premises and the conclusion, and if the premises themselves are fairly inebriate with semi-wisdom, it doesn't matter. The more



important achievement for me here is the *fact of such precise transference of a mode of feeling and thinking typically Indian in growth*. (Its dramatic possibilities are, however, not utilised—there are no cross lights thrown on it.)

(2) *A special repetition pattern:*

meaning . . . is meaningful to meaning (p. 35)

I do not really have the fear of fear. I only have fear.  
(p. 9).

For some reason I was angry, but I could not name the  
name of my anger. (p. 264)

There is nowhere to go, where there is no whereness (p. 306)  
—this is a slight<sup>n</sup> variant.

I don't think these repetitions are successful—they are often irritating. I do, however, see that there is an interesting problem attached to this. Are the repetitions, the leisurely rhythm and a general split-hair feeling, symptoms of a relaxed tradition, largely oral?

(e) *Mannerisms:*

(1) VERBAL

She preserved, *did Lakshamma*, all the clothes of the young  
. . . (p. 9)

He was so noble and humble, Grandfather was. (p. 19)

What wonderful animals these *be* . . . (p. 27)

. . . for in Benares, there *be* many dead . . . (p. 12)

These recurrent deviations from normal prose appear to have a subtle intention. The milieu of a 'fable' (apart from the direct and often successful use of it) underlines by implication the 'wisdom' of the speaker. But while adding wisdom, they also add to 'hoary'-ness which is unkind to twenty-three year old Ramaswamy. Apart from that the preciousness of such exotic use cannot be denied.

(2) A variant of this is the 'Question'

And if they've died *I ask you*, where indeed did they go?  
(p. 8)

Who is it that tells me they did not die? Who but me.  
(p. 7)

Was I really called Ramaswamy, or was Madeleine called  
Madeleine? (p. 16)

## Was I coughing (p. 43)

I should like to connect this mannerism, with the presence of an oral tradition in the culture-context. Its success, as English is open to question, mainly because it seems to *simplify the gestures* of the protagonist in order to create an atmosphere. How do you, besides, reconcile the British Museum, the Cathars, and the slightly unintelligent attitude which necessitates such frequent excursions into questioning? (This would be dramatically right, if used as the main technique of conversation among, say, a group of middle-class women—Saroja's wedding, for instance, provides a suitable milieu.)

It should now be possible to attempt an assessment of some of the simplifications discussed above. Briefly, they are results of an attempt by the author to re-evoke tradition and find himself in rich perspective. The complexity of the tradition sought, his own amazing capacity to *remember vitally*, so much, in spite of long absences abroad, his ability to handle the medium like a virtuoso,—these are some of the factors which make up the simultaneous success and defeat of his task. His success is that of range and general sensitivity: his failure, the impatience with local process. The following passage, I think, shows how the search for tradition and tendencies for simplification are co-existent.

His trident in front of him, his holy books open, some saffron cloth drying anywhere . . . as though the fire in Benares looked after the saints . . . each Sadhu sat, a Shiva. (p. 14)

The attempt is to reach the centre of a certain context in Benares. But the structure is whittled down, in the effort, to such an extent, that the end finds itself approaching an untruth. There is an imperceptible shift, from description to attitude. This is unfortunately made possible by the mere fact of word recurrences—and in this novel the recurrent words are heavily adjectival in implication. They are not neutral or bare. For instance, 'holy', 'sacred', 'timeless', 'saint', 'river'—all these possess dense local association. Added to this they can be grouped under a pronounced single attitude, which is, to make matters more difficult, partially exotic in appeal. This complex develops its logical human dimensions in Rama's *pada pooja*. Putting it in a slightly different way we find a general *exoticism* of experience replacing the need for *exploration*. In terms of process the recurrent Indian

quantity allows points of relaxation in the growth of creative tension. The Indian reader has the well-known signal and the Western reader, pleasant exoticism. Both get an opportunity to avoid the stage by stage detail of experience-patterns. In this general loosening of sensibility particular techniques of perception suffer. The *Satyavrata* story (p. 354) used magnificently to show a certain reading of truth, and the fable of *Durvasa* (p. 385) go unnoticed, because there are the *budumekaye*, 'the bull', 'the elephant' and a pervading atmosphere of incense and ancient mythical names.

This should connect us with the treatment of myth and fable in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Could we call this an influence of post-Eliot West? The answer could be a partial yes. Raja Rao's treatment of the myth resembles that of Eliot in the fact that the myth and the fable are included as sustained quantities of consciousness. But it would be unjust to assert that Raja Rao's use of the myth is modelled on Eliot's. For one thing there is a difference in approach and cognate disciplines. Secondly, Raja Rao's treatment of myth and fable is reminiscent of an Indian tradition of a story-within-the-illustrative-story. Note one distinction, however. Eliot's use of myth is part of the essential structure of his creation. In Raja Rao it is subsidiary. Where he attempts essential connection in the private myth of the bull and the elephant he doesn't succeed. I would attribute lack of success in this direction to his reliance on other quickly rewarding means. That is, the problem of simplification spreads into his use of myth and fable and makes them successful usually at the periphery of experience and not at the centre. The structuring of an elaborate creative tension is harmed by the presence of self-consciousness at the wrong places.

Time now to decide where exactly the West impinges on Raja Rao. The most significant result of the impact on Raja Rao seems to be the completeness of his reaction away from it. Though negative at the point of contact, it leads to an attempt to comprehend his own culture richly. As a response of an expatriate writer this is significant. It represents his best effort to escape a pervading sense of isolation. As an exploration of this state *The Serpent and the Rope* has a right to belong with the other major novels of the time. Its failure to achieve commensurate success should be traced to some of the issues discussed above.



# THE SHORT STORY IN MODERN INDIAN LITERATURE

M. RAMA RAO



THOUGH the history of story-telling is perhaps as old as that of human society, the historical evolution of the Short Story can be traced back only to comparatively recent times, for every story that is short is not and need not be a Short Story. In fact, it is quite a new comer in literature and its active development as a form followed by more than a century that of the novel. But the youngest child that it is, the Short Story has firmly established itself as a favourite form in modern literature. One obvious reason for its immense vogue has been 'the rush of modern life' which has made man impatient of the huge tomes, 'the great still books', as Tennyson called the novels over which readers spent long hours in more leisurely ages. The unprecedented development of the magazine—there are magazines devoted to the publication of short stories only—the cinema and radio broadcasting have also helped the evolution of tales complete in themselves both in theme and treatment and yet demanding not much time for their perusal.

The popularity of the Short Story has made some people go to the extent of saying that it will be the ruling form of fiction and that ultimately it will displace the Novel entirely. But there is little substance in this claim and there need be no fear that what it prognosticates is likely to happen at any time. For the functions and achievements of the Short Story and of the Novel are not and cannot be identical. The Short Story is not merely the Novel on a smaller scale. It is neither an abridgement nor a fragment of the Novel. The Novel can deal with the whole life of a man, a whole society or a whole generation. It can exhibit life in all its complexity and the evolution of character in all its subtlety, as Tolstoy does in *War and Peace* and *Anna Kerenina* and George Eliot in *Romola*. There are novels which comprehend in their sweep two or three generations, as does Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*. The novelist pays and can pay equal attention to plot, characterisation, narration, dialogue, etc. We can

study a novel from several points of view. Our admiration for it can be many-sided. And, it need hardly be said, the length of a novel necessitates leisurely reading.

The Short Story is a smaller affair, but not less artistic than the Novel. If the Novel is the Epic in prose, the Short Story is the Lyric, giving concentrated and emphatic expression to a moment's experience and producing a unity or totality of impression on the mind of the reader. The length of the Novel could be, and, has often been even in the works of the best-known writers an effective impediment to the creation of such an impression. For the Novel deals with a multitude of people and a multiplicity of incidents. Even if a single individual dominates the story, as in Meredith's *Egoist*, his life is depicted in such detail and on such a large canvas that our attention is divided among, if not exhausted by, different conflicting or equally attractive excellences. In order to achieve unity of impression, the writer of a short story, should, on the contrary, exercise strict self-restraint. He should ruthlessly exclude every detail which is superfluous and which hinders the creation of that singleness of impression. Brevity and rapidity of movement are essential to the Short Story. The maximum effort should be achieved with the minimum of words. Edgar Allan Poe emphasizes this need in the Short Story in no uncertain terms when he says: 'A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents, but having conceived with deliberate care a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of fullest satisfaction'.

This limitation in length gives rise to certain other outstanding characteristics of the Short Story. The writer of a Short Story cannot aim at depicting life in all its 'variety and complexity'. For that would entail the introduction of a prohibitively large



number of incidents and episodes. A novel can give us a full picture of an individual and of the social milieu in the midst of which he lives and moves. It can also present to us in varying degrees of minuteness—as do the novels of Thackeray, Dickens and Hardy—pictures of other men and women with whom he comes into contact and who influence his life for good or bad. There is practically no limit to the number of persons and events that may crop up in a novel. It can even describe in detail the physical background against which the drama of the heroes' life is enacted. It is not infrequent for the novelist himself to step forward and talk, standing between his readers and the characters of his novel. But these liberties are not available to the writer of a Short Story. He can present but one character (or at the most two) and show *that one* character in a particular situation only. The social and physical background—the theatre of his activities—can only be hinted at or sketched with a couple of strokes. In choosing the incident to be described or trait to be emphasized the story-teller should exercise his judgment and select only those incidents and aspects of character which are indispensable for the production of the contemplated impression. He must, as A. H. Upham puts it, 'see the end in the beginning.' Padding and woolliness have no place in a Short Story and it should be simple, straight and direct. The Short Story writer does not have another advantage which is available to the novelist, namely, the possibility of delineating character from different points of view (as is done by Henry James and Faulkner). The novelist gives much and expects little; the Short Story writer gives little and expects much. The Novel satisfies, sometimes even surfeits, the imagination; the Short Story can but stimulate it.

Consistent with the requirement of brevity and concentration, the Short Story may deal with any subject under the heavens and no rigid rule could be laid down even about its length. The shortest Short Story known, consists, according to Jepson, of two sentences only: 'I don't believe in ghosts', said a gentleman to his fellow-traveller in the railway carriage. 'Oh, don't you?' said the other and vanished. There are on the other hand, stories which are almost novelets in their dimensions. The methods and themes employed by Short Story writers have been astonishingly variegated. Direct narration by the author, the use of the monologue or dialogue form or the epistolary technique,



dashing off a few suggestive pictures—all have been used successfully by different writers. Emphasis may be laid in the Short Story exclusively on plot, characterisation or atmosphere, or, in exceptional instances, on all of them simultaneously. The elements of suspense and surprise, mystery and horror, gloom and humour, allegory and romance, seriousness and fantasy may all be there according to the necessity of the subject dealt with or the purpose of the writer. As Stevenson succinctly remarked to his biographer, Graham Balfour, 'There are three ways and three ways only of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and chose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly, you may take a certain atmosphere, and get actions and persons to realise it'. More recently still, 'certain recognizable thematic patterns differing sharply from the action story' have arisen making this form of fiction one of the most fruitful and prolific fields for experimentation and the introduction of novelty.

These distinguishing features of the Short Story are not always present in the tales that have come down from antiquity onwards in all countries. We have had in India stories which lie imbedded in the hymns of the *Rigveda* or scattered in the *Upanishads* and the Epics, the stories which constitute the *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesha*, the *Suka Saptati* the *Dashakumara Charita*, the *Katha Saritsagara* and the *Vetalapanchavimshati* in Sanskrit, the Buddhist *Jataka* stories in Pali and a host of similar stories in our modern Indian languages. Other countries possess stories like the legends of ancient Greece, Rome and Scandinavia, Aesop's Fables, and the tales told by Chaucer, Boccaccio and others. There are also the stories contained in the Bible and those of the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*. But, though we cannot deny their fascination even for modern readers, most of these ancient and medieval tales are didactic in purpose and moral in tone. Not a few of them deal with impossible achievements and extravagant adventures and exaggerated sentiments. A series of events loosely strung together with no attention paid to the artistic principles of plot or characterisation, is often called a story.

The first men to write short stories of the modern type may be said to have been Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49) and Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64) of America. It was Poe himself that, in

the course of his review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* first formulated the principles governing the composition of the Short Story. Washington Irving, Brete Harte and Henry James may be mentioned among the other Americans who contributed to the growth of the Short Story in its incipient days. Irving's stories, though otherwise defective, illustrated how character could be delineated, a mood conveyed or an atmosphere created in a Short Story. He lacked mastery of technique which, however, was developed by Hawthorne and Poe, particularly the latter. Brete Harte was the pioneer in the introduction of local colour in the Short Story and making short stories 'vehicles of single impressions'. Henry James added subtlety of suggestion and description of mental and psychological states of character by means of appropriate details. French and Russian masters of the art, like Maupassant, Chekhov and others propelled the Short Story further on its way of progress by introducing into it naturalism and realism. Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Mrs Gaskell, Thackeray, Trollope and Stevenson made the Short Story firmly established as a form of art, 'capable of communicating varied impressions of life and evoking all kinds of emotions'. Hardy, Kipling, Galsworthy, Wells, Catherine Mansfield, A. E. Coppard, Sherlock Holmes, Hemingway, Faulkner, Stephen Crane and others have been the principal practitioners of the art in the present century. 'All these writers, so different from one another in their outlook on life, their temperament and their methods, have yet found in the short story one of the finest vehicles for the communication of their experiences of life. This is an unmistakable proof of the variety of the Short Story and the elasticity of its form'.

Together with many another form of belle-letters which modern Indian literatures have taken from the West, the Short Story captivated the attention of our writers before the nineteenth century came to a close. It has been one of the most popular forms of literature produced in our country during the last three quarters of a century. In consequence of the introduction of printing and the gradual extension of literacy in the land, a considerable number of periodicals arose in different languages and they provided plenty of fillip to the growth of the Short Story. Readers as well as writers found in the Short Story a handy form of fiction which they could manage easily. This form has been



specially useful to writers intent upon picturing the changing aspects of society and expressing their attitudes towards it or communicating their impressions of it. A vast and varied society like ours cannot easily be comprehended in a single novel. Even novels of considerable bulk can do justice only to a section or some sections of our huge social organisation and economic structure. The Short Story, on the contrary, seems to be peculiarly suited to the mirroring of our life since the writer of it can choose any one part of life and deal with it with the attention, care, and mastery which it requires. For it must be admitted that in spite of—or, perhaps, by virtue of—its limitations, the scope of the short story writer is much wider than that of the novelist as it allows far greater variation in theme and treatment. This facility which the Short Story provides the writer with has been responsible for the large number of votaries which this form has found in all parts of India. The brevity of the Short Story, the comparatively less taxing demand that it makes on the time of the reader and the possibility of its including all aspects of life and society which the novelist cannot always pay attention to has made the Short Story popular among our readers of fiction also.

It would be an insuperable task even to take stock of the achievements of all the languages of India in this fertile field during a wide period of three generations. In fact, the vastness of the material, not to speak of the formidable problem of getting over language barriers would itself be enough to unnerve a would-be reviewer.

Fortunately, some aid has been provided by translators who have felt the need to bring to the notice of the outside world the work that is being done in our languages. Not less than half a dozen volumes of short stories translated from several Indian languages have been brought out in recent years. *Indian Short Stories*, edited by Mulk Raj Anand and Iqbal Singh, *Indian Short Stories*, edited by Mohanlal Saxena, *Contemporary Indian Short Stories, Series 1*, published by the Sahitya Akademi, *Green and Gold, Stories and Poems from Bengal*, edited by Humayun Kabir and others, *The Plough and the Stars, Stories from Tamilnad*, edited by K. Swaminathan and others, and *Contemporary Hindi Short Stories*, published by the Writers' Workshop, Calcutta, are among these anthologies of Indian Short Stories available in English. There are, besides these, translations into English



of the stories of Rabindranath Tagore and the translations of his own stories from Kannada by Masti Venkatesha Iyengar. Stray translations made by others have appeared in magazines and newspapers. We have also Indian writers of short stories who have been using English itself as their medium, namely, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Kushwant Singh, Bhavani Bhattacharya and Manjeri Iswaran. There are a few translations of stories from one Indian language into another—for example, into Kannada and Telugu, which I have had the pleasure of reading. These compilations are, it could be said, sufficiently representative and enable us to arrive at a fair idea of the harvest that has been reaped in this field. The following account of the Short Story in modern Indian languages is mostly based on them.

Even on a cursory glance through these volumes one is struck by the wide range of subject matter that our writers have chosen for treatment in their short stories. Romantic, of course, were the themes which attracted them in the days when the Short Story first claimed their attention. Rabindranath Tagore, who might, not without justice, be called the pioneer writer of short stories in India, described his short stories 'as the life of Bengal seen through the window of his moving boat'. We no doubt get glimpses of this life through the window. But it is life seen through the glass-pane of the imaginative romanticism which coloured so many of Tagore's writings. *The Hungry Stones*, *The Cabuliwallah*, *The Post Master*, *The Castaway*, *The Supreme Vision*, *The Babus of Nayanjore*, etc., all show this tendency. Equally romantic were the stories of Bankim Chandra who preceded Tagore and of Manindralal Basu who succeeded him. Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee wrote about the experiences of Indian students abroad and the emotional entanglements which they easily involved themselves in at the impressionable age when they went out. His story, *The Price of Flowers*, is full of sympathy for an old English mother and her young daughter. The brother of the girl—Miss Clifford—has served as a soldier in India and died there, and the girl, an ill-paid typist in an office, sacrifices her own comforts in sending some money with her Indian friend, Mr Gupta, to buy flowers to be placed on the grave of her brother. *Sitesh's Story*, by Pramath Chaudhury, is a story of the consummate deception practised upon an Indian by a woman

who declares that it is man's money and not man's love that she is in need of. Both the stories are full of pathos and the second one also reveals the powers of irony and humour which the author possessed. The Assamese writer, Laxminath Bezboroa, has in his *Bhadari* described the 'unsophisticated domesticity' of a villager and his wife. So does Akhtar Mohi-ud-din's Kashmiri story, *The Bride's Pyjamas* in which the old man, Nabir Shalla, delights to see his aged wife donning her bridal dress of far off days which she has preserved in a bundle of old-clothes. Romantic in theme is Banaphool's *One of Those* in which an old husband, who is a mail-sorter, desperately casts about for new ways of winning the heart of his dissatisfied young wife, as the mail train in which he works rockets through the darkness of a stormy night, hoping to collect words and phrases which are likely to produce the desired effect and finds that the author of one of the letters is his own wife and that she has written to her lover asking him to take her away during the absence of 'the old mug', her husband. Many of Masti Venkatesha Iyengar's stories, again, are characterised by this same tone of romanticism and idealisation. Among other beautiful stories of this type are the Tamil stories *Bridegroom Again* by R. Balakrishnan and *Tearless Eyes* by Jamila. Love, the simplicity and happiness of unsophisticated rustic life and the beauty of the rural background, common human emotions and situations, in short, are the dominant notes of these stories.

But the element of realism crept into the Indian Short Story soon. It was but natural—even inevitable—that our writers should turn their attention to the burning problems of society and exploit the possibilities that they offered. Social evils like the agonies of the young widow (Tagore himself dealt with this theme in his *Living or Dead?*) the poverty-stricken servant and dependent, toiling in the rich man's house, complexities of marital maladjustment and other problems of family life in general and social injustices of different kinds, the effects of unemployment and other economic hardships—these problems came up for treatment. Economic problems engaged the attention of writers especially after World War I, the Russian Revolution and the Gandhian Movements. The Short Story which at first had given a prominent place to upper and middle class society extended its arms to include other sections also. With the spread of popular



education and the increase of the consciousness of everybody's rights, writers also came up from these sections. The rustic farmer, the factory worker and the hard labourer in the city find their places in these new stories. A society which has had to make adjustments from the old order to the new provides abundant material for writers who have a reformist zeal. Jayakanthan's Tamil story, *The Staff of Life*, deals with a riksha-puller about whom and whose customer—a decrepit old woman—the writer says, 'Like his passenger he was a consumptive; his vehicle too was another consumptive. The rikshaw moved along, consumption riding in triumph down the road in a chariot of dust'. Na. Parthasarathy's *Right-Spiralled Conch* is another Tamil story which presents a conch-fisher who is forced by a greedy and heartless contractor to dive deep into the sea to bring back a right-spiralled conch which he has picked up earlier and dropped on coming to the surface owing to the shock caused by the news that his beloved wife died of child-birth.

Concern with economic and social problems has led some writers to become outspokenly propagandistic in their tone and in the treatment of their themes. The whole of Mulk Raj Anand and Iqbal Singh's collection seems to have been inspired by this motive. In it are stories which highlight the reformist bias of the writers unmistakably. *Drought* by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee presents a graphic picture of the sufferings of a tenant in a Zamindari village during drought and the callousness of his landlord. *Kashmir Idyll* (the very title of the story is ironical) by Mulk Raj Anand is full of bitter irony and contains a startling vignette of the exploitation of the voiceless poor by a heartless aristocrat. The theme of Anand's *Barbers' Trade Union* is the transformation of the economically exploited and socially backward classes into self-assertive and self-respecting members of society. *One Day* by Jugal Kishore Shukla catalogues a series of grimly realistic experiences of a porter. *When One Is In It* by Iqbal Singh presents similar pictures of a helpless woman who has been forced into immorality by unemployment and poverty and the unscrupulous and beastly manager of a mill who agrees to give her a job on a pittance purely for personal and extra-industrial purposes. (A comparison of this story with Ahmed Abbas's *The Rice* illustrates how two themes, more or less similar, could be made offensive or attractive to the refined sentiments of a reader,



Abbas's story being definitely more moving without sacrificing the requirements of decency).

Excellent stories on historical themes have been written by Masti Venkatesha Iyengar in Kannada, 'Somu' in Tamil and Rahul Sankrutyayan in Hindi. Venkatesha Iyengar's *Sri Ramanuja's Wife, The Krishna Idol of Penukonda, The Last Days of Sariputta, The Pandit's Will and Testament* and *The Queen of Nijagal*, Somu's *Udayakumari*, Sankrutyayan's *Prabha* and Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyaya's *Megh Mallar* are fine examples of how historical subject matter could be made to serve as a capital source of basic material for short stories by competent imaginative writers. Venkatesha Iyengar, has revealed remarkable insight into historical situations and the human personality which reveals itself against the background of those situations. His *Queen of Nijagal* and *The Krishna Idol of Penukonda* are eloquent examples of this power which he commands in abundance. It is, by the way, interesting to note that a good many stories with historical settings have Buddhist themes. Venkatesha Iyengar has also given ample evidence of another great power of his, namely, the imaginative recreation of scenes and situations on the basis of hints contained in old books. His *Last Days of Sariputta* is itself one such story in which he visualises the return of Sariputta to his native village on the banks of the Narmada after an absence of forty years. But even more amazing is the skill with which he weaves an imaginary picture of Shakuntala paying a visit to Kanva's Ashrama some time after her reunion with Dushyanta and return to his palace as the principal queen. The insight into her nature shown by the story-writer testifies to genius of the first order. Masti's own *Masumatti* and Saradendu Banerjee's *The Divine Image* are other stories of the same category, though the setting in them is modern.

Stories of character and atmosphere and stories which present and appeal to certain moods are also found in plenty. Tagore's *Babus of Nayanjore*, Raja Rao's *Javni*, Masti's *Subbanna* and *Mosarina Mangamma* (or *Curds Seller*), and Dhumaketu's *The Letter* are laudable examples of this type. Subtle psychological analysis of character and situation and states of mind have been successfully achieved by Venkatesha Iyengar in such great stories as *Was It Indira? Story of The Holy Feast* and *Sri Ramanuja's Wife*, by another Kannada writer, Ananda, in *The Girl I Killed*,

by Manoj Basu in *The Ghost*, and Premchand in *God Lives In The Panch*. Subodh Ghose's *The Waiting Room* in which an erstwhile husband and wife who have divorced each other and married again meet casually for an hour or so in the waiting room of a railway station, to separate again, is remarkable for its dramatic power and suggestive undertones of feeling. Santosh Kumar Ghosh's *Devaluation* is another story in which emotional conflict is handled with great delicacy. The heroine, Savithri, who attempts when it is too late to become a film actress finds that her body has no value for the cine-producer and her purity has similarly lost its value for her husband—that she has become devalued both ways. Narayana Durai Kannan's Tamil story *The Cloud* treats of an elder sister who, though otherwise a pleasant girl, suddenly plunges into a mood of despair and gloom on seeing her younger sister, who is married and has a child, paying a triumphant visit to her parental home and made much of by everyone in the house, and gets out of that mood equally suddenly on realising that she is dampening the joy of others. Extraordinary studies of the elusive subtlety of human conduct and motive have been given by Padmaraju in his gripping story *On The Boat*. It is a wonderful example of the harmonious blending of setting, action, characterisation and dialogue. Manik Bandyopadhyaya's *Prehistoric*, the hero of which is a robber whom necessity has turned into a beggar, has the grim realism of a story of Brete Harte and reveals the powerful working of the basic human emotions in persons apparently incapable of it. The supernatural has been employed effectively in Tagore's *The Skeleton*, Venkatesha Iyengar's *A Malnad Ghost*, and *The Letter* by Dhumketu. Tara Sankara Banerjee's *Boatman Tarini* is a remarkable story which creates atmosphere in which a terror-inspiring picture of the Mayurakshi river as both preserver and destroyer of boatman Tarini and man's impotent and pathetic dependence on the vagaries of Nature has been presented in language which is at the same time graphic and poetic.

Children have been beautifully pictured by Tagore in *The Castaway* and *Home-Coming*, Manindralal Basu in *Sorrows of Flowers*, Mulk Raj Anand in *The Child* (indeed, he calls the three stories about children included in his *Barbers' Trade Union And Other Stories*, 'Three Prose Poems'), Alagiri Swami in *Raja has Come*, Chellappa in *The Lame Child*, Janaki Ram in *Exultation*



(these three are in the Tamil language), Ananda in *Sarasu's Doll* and R. K. Narayan in *Unbreakable Doll*. The influence of children in humanising the hardened hearts of adults is the theme of Srinivasa Siromani's Telugu story *Tāta* and the mother's solicitude for the child that of Shanta Devi's Bengali story, *The Mother*.

Moving stories of animals and man's relation to them have been written by Poonkunnam Varkey in *The Talking Plough* (Malayalam) Masti Venkatesha Iyengar in *The Kalmādi Buffalo* (Kannada), Kalindicharan Panigrahi in *Only A Dog* (Oriya) and R. K. Narayan in *The Blind Dog* and *Attila* (English).

The growth of modern psychology has not failed to wield its influence on our story writers. Freudian theories, the stream of consciousness technique, etc., are being employed, especially by the younger writers in different languages. In Kannada, for instance, this has been done ably by Ramachandra Sharma in *Seragina Kenda* (which may be Englished as *Skeleton in the Cupboard*) in which the past history of the dying Meenakshi is brought out by a succession of ejaculatory outbursts.

*The Water Came into the Tap* by Sadasiva (Kannada) has made effective use of the imagist technique. The drying up of the tap is conceived as the image of the drying up of fellow-feeling and pity in the heart of the leading character, Rangamma, and the water flowing again in the tap symbolises the resurgence of humanity in the same woman. In *The Parrot in the Cage* by the Urdu authoress, Attia Habibullah the Cage stands for the narrow family circle which stifles the freedom of the helpless daughter. In Narayana Gangopadhyaya's Bengali story, *The Fly Trap*, the fly trap is the name of a flower called Venus's Fly Trap—supplying the image of the perilous lure of love.

Stories dealing with fantastic or fanciful themes are not lacking as could be seen in *The Stars* by Raja Ratnam, in which Uncle Ram the astrologer miscalculates the time of his own expected death and becomes the laughing stock of people (including his wife) who are eager to see him die. In *The Mathematician* by Alagu Subramanyam for no convincing reason whatever Chandran the Professor of Mathematics goes mad because of his monomaniac preoccupation with the subject of his study.

Humour too is present on a considerable scale in many of our writers. Tagore's stories like *Subha* and *The Babus of Nanyanjore* have streaks of this element peeping here and there.



Masti Venkatesha Iyengar's three stories on Rangappa's Marriage, Courtship and Festival of Lights and other stories of his like *Venkatarao's Ghost* and *My Teacher*, R. K. Narayan's *Father's Help* and *Fellow Feeling* and Ananda's *The Wife's Letter*, Prem Chand's *The Child* and *Resignation*, G. D. Khosla's *On The Firm* are good specimens of these. The political and other movements in the country have supplied some of our writers with new themes for their stories as is evidenced by Manjeri Iswaran's *Between Two Flags*, with its father and son—the former a product of the bureaucratic British regime and the latter a child of awakened India of the Gandhian days,—R. K. Narayan's *Half A Rupee Worth*, dealing with a blackmarketer in grain, who brings death upon himself by his excessive greed, and Bhavani Bhattacharya's *Desperate Women* which presents a black-marketer in clothes compelled to become liberal by an effective device employed by the women of his village. Even the recent Indo-Pakistani war has provided material for some of our short story writers, as may be gathered from stories appearing in periodicals. Pleasing stories with a serious moralising intention but in which the didactic element does not distract the attention of the reader from the art have been written by C. Rajagopalachari (Eg. *The Nose-Jewel*) and Kumaraswamy (Eg. *Tears*) in Tamil. Detective stories do not seem to have caught the fancy of our writers to any very appreciable extent.

This exhilarating variety of themes in the Indian Short Story is paralleled by an equally satisfying variety of techniques. The direct method of narration has of course been employed by almost every writer, though it must be noted that it has encouraged some writers to indulge in unnecessary expatiation on dispensable details. So great a master of the art as Masti Venkatesha Iyengar is among those who have been guilty of this violation of the principle of Unity in the Short Story. The autobiographical or first-personal narration is found in Pramath Chaudhuri's *Sitesh's Story*, Raja Rao's *Javni*, Padmaraju's *On The Boat*, Gangopadhya's *The Fly Trap*, Venkatesha Iyengar's *Was It Indira?* and Manoj Basu's *The Ghost*. The appropriateness of this method to the themes of those stories becomes evident to any reader. The epistolary method has been well used by Masti Venkatesha Iyengar in his *A Letter Of The Abbé Dubois*. The same writer has made use of the 'Diary' method in his *The Judgement Here*.

How effectively dialogue could be exploited for the progress of action and the revelation of character is illustrated by Raja Rao's *Javni*, Padmaraju's *On The Boat*, Prabhat Kumar Mukerjee's *The Prince of Flowers*, Masti's *The Curd Seller* and Narayan's *Fellow Feeling*. With what dramatic force and fruitfulness the elements of irony, surprise and suspense could be used in a short story may be seen in Narayan's *Half A Rupee Worth* and Ahmed Abbas's *Swallows*. These two stories represent a very satisfactory blending of plot, action, characterisation, dialogue, brevity and dramatic vigour and speed. The mention of brevity should remind us of the absence of any fixed standard of measurement in this matter. There have been stories running only into a page and a half or two, as those of Rajagopalachari, or they may be as lengthy as Masti's *Subbanna* which contains material for a good-sized novel. The elasticity of the form of the Short Story has resulted in some writers producing what may more strictly be termed character-sketches rather than short stories. Such are *Ugrappa's New Year Day* by Masti and *Tiny's Granny* by Ismat Chughtai. The second of these—surprisingly fresh in its portraiture of an old woman of questionable character who nevertheless deserves our pity—stands in interesting contrast to the idealised picture of an old widow in a south Indian family that we find in K. S. Venkataramani's *My Grandmother* and A. N. Moorthy Rao's Kannada sketch, *Granny Gowramma*. Gudipati Venkatachalam's Telugu sketch, *Seshamma* (included among his short stories) may be said to be midway between the two in its semi-sarcastic, semi-sympathetic picture of an old widow slaving machine-like for the benefit of others.

This wide variety of subject-matter and diversity in technique and treatment of the themes brings out the many-sided progress of the Short Story in modern Indian languages. But, the translations which are available either in English or in Indian languages are, it should be kept in mind, like ice-burys only a fraction of the real dimensions of which is visible above the surface. For every story that is available in translation there must be hundreds of others which the readers outside a particular linguistic group are unaware of. This large number is quite natural to a type of literature which holds the mirror to a society in its transitional and emergent stage as ours is today. Our values and ideals of life and conduct have been changing so swiftly that a succession of



impressions and emotional experiences are engendered in the minds and hearts of sensitive men and women, and no other medium of writing is so well fitted for the enshrining of these impressions and the evocation of corresponding responses in the readers than the Short Story. It could be said that the quarry for supplying material for the Short Story is almost inexhaustible in the Indian society of today, passing as it is from the old order to the new in every field of life with the consequent conflicts and tensions in mental, moral, social, economic and religious matters. The onward march of democracy has resulted in the increasing recognition of the common man and the importance of his thoughts and feelings. Here is God's own plenty for writers and readers alike. Of course, no one can pretend that the Short Story can or will do all that the Novel can. But it is like the old story of the mountain and the mouse in Emerson's poem. The Short Story may not be able to depict a whole society in all its complexity; nor can the Novel present a moment's experience with the intensity and concentrated force of the Short Story. They are distinct achievements, each an equally important province of Fiction.

Let me not be misunderstood. I am not suggesting that every story written in every Indian language is of a high grade or even passably good. A large number of them—as I know from stories published in this part of the country, especially in periodicals—are undeniably below the mark. There was a time when almost every educated candidate for marriage thought it necessary to invite a hastily-dashed-off piece of romantic stuff to establish his eligibility to enter the holy land of matrimony. This epidemic seems to have subsided, though it has not yet been and cannot be (perhaps should not be) completely exterminated. Stories on other and widely differing themes have been coming up and it would be fruitful to undertake a comparative study of the quality, the themes and the variety of techniques found in the stories in different languages and linguistic groups. For example, it would be quite valuable, both from the literary and the sociological points of view, to find out whether a certain type of subject matter finds favour with South Indian writers and another with those of the North, and whether the South Indian's sense of humour is the same as or different from that of the Northerner. Nay, the differences in content and humour or pathos may very well influence the methods of composition too. And, while each



regional or linguistic unit within the country may have its own distinguishing tone, there is, undoubtedly, an essentially Indian tone in all these stories. A whole civilization, the traditions of a whole social strata are perceptible in stories like Raja Rao's *Javni*, Bezbaroa's *Bhadāri* or Masti Venkatesha Iyengar's *Sri Ramanuja's Wife*, *The Curd Seller* and *The Kalmādi Buffalo*. It would be interesting to investigate into these differences and common features. It would, I think, be equally useful to study how far the stage of development reached by each regional language—particularly in prose—has helped or hindered the achievement of success in the field of the Short Story. Institutions like the Sahitya Akādemi could organise such a study and facilitate it by bringing out more and more translations of stories from one Indian language into another and from Indian languages into English. A comparative evaluation of these translations may itself be a revealing piece of research, showing as it will the susceptibility of works in one Indian language to be translated into another Indian language and in Indian languages in general into English.

## THE WRITER AND THE WORD

RAJA RAO

TRIPLE are the constituents of a book—the word, the author, the reader. The word which says what the author has to indicate, and the reader has to apprehend, seems to be the one element we seem to neglect, as if it were something we know so well that we may not investigate as to its nature, its function, its end. For the word like every constituted thing seems to have a birth, a life-span, and a death. In the word Rama before saying Ra, there was nothing, as it were; after saying Ra there is just Ra; and when ma is said ma is heard; and then Rama comes to be after the two syllables have been experienced in an enunciation. Now the problem is, if Rama, or Agni, or Vriksha have any life at all beyond their birth, existence, and extinction, of a sentence like ‘Rama went into exile’, if Rama were just two syllables, two breaths, that the vocal chord shapes into a sound apprehended, we would have as many words as statements such as it must have been when man began—that is, if man began at all.

If (the word) Rama has just one single moment of existence there would therefore be no language at all. All statements would just be cries. But since the word Rama has, or seems to have, some permanent existence, it is fair that *intellectuals* should inquire, how it came to be that a sound began to have some sort of permanent existence.

But we all, anyone, anywhere in the world, would like to have a language that will mean the same thing and for all time. It is just the same way that you feel you will live for ever, though your life span might be seventy or eighty years. The *feel* that you are everlasting demands that everything be everlasting. Hence the demand that the word be eternal. If man is eternal, so is the word.

Is the word Rama then eternal? The combination of ‘Ra’ with ‘ma’ which makes the word Rama, you will remember, creates a new entity. ‘Ra’ and ‘ma’ together is not ‘Ra’ *plus* ‘ma’ but is in fact beyond both sounds, hence it becomes a word. And so when you can pronounce the word correctly, and

say Rama, you create a vibration which when it dies in the hearer (we have not yet come to the reader) you have another person who experiences the sound at the end of which experience he should know Rama in the way you wanted Rama understood. So that Rama must mean the same thing to you and to him and as such Rama has to be of an unchanging nature. Thus a vibration or a series of vibrations must mean at all time the same thing, for otherwise you would not have used it, and the hearer would not understand it as such. This comes to mean finally that he who says the word enunciates the word, and he who hears it has to have the eternal part awakened in him so that there could be right communication. If the transient speaks to the transient it becomes a cacophony. But if the eternal, the unchanging, speaks to the unchanging we have one language.

Now, some languages have history and according to some all languages have history. It would be better to say just as Indian civilization is the making of the Rishis (the sages) and the Western, of heroes and prophets, that some languages seem to have this breath of eternity in them and have attained then the status of what A. E. called 'the language of the gods,' others are mere vernaculars.

The Sanscrit language is such a 'language of the gods' and through Sanscrit all Indo-European languages participate in this, including the much abused English language. After all, remember, Shakespeare used the English language.

Therefore my argument is, unless you, the writer, could go back to the changeless in yourself, you could not truly communicate with the reader, if at that level the reader exists at all, for the question: who speaks to whom? would not arise at all.

There is considerable talk in the world of (at the Unesco there is a special department devoted to) communication. It is my conviction (basing myself on my Indian background) that you cannot communicate unless you have *no* desire to communicate.

*Maunavy kya praktha prabrahma tatvam*

Unless the author becomes an *upasaka* and enjoys himself in himself (which is *rasa*) the eternality of the sound (*Sabda*) will not manifest itself, and so you cannot communicate either and the word is nothing but a cacophony.



The word indeed is eternal. Man faces himself when he seeks the word. The word as pure sound is but a communication that comes from silence. The word is but vibrant silence compounded into a momentary act. The act has to be like prayer if it should yield what you want it to yield. Even to say a flower, let alone Rama, you must be able to say it in such a way that the force of the vocable has power to create the flower. Unless word becomes *mantra* no writer is a writer, and no reader a reader.

For the right reader-to-be, the writer has therefore to become an *upasaka* of the word. Thus we give sound back to silence and the seemingly divided remains undivided.

Let us therefore, not heed expressions like 'the reading public,' 'communication' etc. We in India need but to recognise our inheritance. Let us never forget Bhartrihari.

## THE WORLD OF THE STORYTELLER\*

R. K. NARAYAN

HE is part and parcel of the Indian village community, which is somewhat isolated from the main stream of modern life. The nearest railway station is sixty miles away, to be reached by an occasional bus passing down the highway, which again may be an hour's marching distance from the village by a shortcut across the canal. Tucked away thus, the village consists of less than a hundred houses, scattered in six crisscross streets. The rice fields stretch away westward and merge into the wooded slopes of the mountains. Electricity is coming or has come to another village, only three miles away, and water is obtainable from a well open to the skies in the centre of the village. All day the men and women are active in the fields, digging, ploughing, transplanting, or harvesting. At seven o'clock (or in the afternoon if a man-eater is reported to be about) everyone is home.

Looking at them from outside, one may think that they lack the amenities of modern life; but actually they have no sense of missing much; on the contrary, they give an impression of living in a state of secret enchantment. The source of enchantment is the storyteller in their midst, a grand old man who seldom stirs from his ancestral home on the edge of the village, the orbit of his movements being the vegetable patch at the back and a few coconut palms in his front yard, except on some very special occasion calling for his priestly services in a village home. Sitting bolt upright, cross-legged on the cool clay-washed floor of his house, he may be seen any afternoon poring over a ponderous volume in the Sanskrit language mounted on a wooden reading stand, or tilting towards the sunlight at the doorway some old palm-leaf manuscript. When people want a story, at the end of their day's labours in the fields, they silently assemble in front of his home, especially on evenings when the moon shines through the coconut palms.

\* Reproduced with the author's permission from his introduction to *Gods, Demons and Others*.

On such occasions the storyteller will dress himself for the part by smearing sacred ash on his forehead and wrapping himself in a green shawl, while his helpers set up a framed picture of some god on a pedestal in the veranda, decorate it with jasmine garlands, and light incense to it. After these preparations, when the storyteller enters to seat himself in front of the lamps, he looks imperious and in complete control of the situation. He begins the session with a prayer, prolonging it until the others join and the valleys echo with the chants, drowning the cry of jackals. Time was when he narrated his stories to the accompaniment of musical instruments, but now he depends only on himself. 'The films have taken away all the fiddlers and crooners, who have no time nowadays to stand at the back of an old storyteller, and fill his pauses with music,' he often comments. But he can never really be handicapped through the lack of an understudy or assistants, as he is completely self-reliant, knowing as he does by heart all the 24,000 stanzas of the *Ramayana*, the 100,000 stanzas of the *Mahabharata*, and the 18,000 stanzas of the *Bhagavata*. If he keeps a copy of the Sanskrit text open before him, it is more to demonstrate to his public that his narration is backed with authority.

The Pandit (as he is called) is a very ancient man, continuing in his habits and deportment the traditions of a thousand years, never dressing himself in more than two pieces of cotton drapery. (But sometimes he may display an amazing knowledge of modern life, acquired through the perusal of a bundle of old newspapers brought to him by the 'weekly' postman every Thursday afternoon.) When he shaves his head (only on days prescribed in the almanac), he leaves just a small tuft on the top, since the ancient scriptures, the shastras, prescribe that a man should wear his hair no thicker than what could pass through the silver ring on his finger; and you may be sure he has on his finger a silver ring, because that is also prescribed in the shastras. Every detail of his life is set for him by what the shastras say; that is the reason why he finds it impossible to live in a modern town—to leave his home where his forefathers practised unswervingly the codes set down in the shastras. He bathes twice daily at the well, and prays thrice, facing east or west according to the hour of the day; chooses his food according to the rules in the almanac, fasts totally one



day every fortnight, breaking his fast with greens boiled in salt water. The hours that he does not spend in contemplation or worship are all devoted to study.

His children could not, of course, accept his pattern of life and went their ways, seeking their livelihood in distant cities. He himself lives on the produce of his two acres and the coconut garden; and on the gifts that are brought him for story-telling—especially at the happy conclusion of a long series or when God incarnates himself as a baby of this world or marries a goddess in the course of a story. He is completely at peace with himself and his surroundings. He has unquestioned faith in the validity of the *Vedas*, which he commenced learning when he was seven years old. It took him twelve years to master the intonation of the *Vedas*. He had also to acquire precise knowledge of Sanskrit grammar, syllabification, meaning of words.

Even his daily life is based on the authority of the *Vedas*, which have in them not only prayer and poetry, but also guidance in minor matters. For instance, whenever he finds his audience laughing too loudly and protractedly at his humour, he instantly quotes an epigram to show that laughter should be dignified and refreshing rather than demonstrative. He will openly admonish those who are seen scratching their heads, and quote authority to say that if the skin itches it should be borne until one can retire into privacy and there employ the tip of a stag-horn, rather than fingernails, for the purpose. He has no doubt whatever that the *Vedas* were created out of the breath of God, and contain within them all that a man needs for his salvation at every level.

Even the legends and myths, as contained in the puranas, of which there are eighteen major ones, are mere illustrations of the moral and spiritual truths enunciated in the *Vedas*. 'No one can understand the significance of any story in our mythology unless he is deeply versed in the *Vedas*,' the storyteller often declares. Everything is interrelated. Stories, scriptures, ethics, philosophy, grammar, astrology, astronomy, semantics, mysticism, and moral codes—each forms part and parcel of a total life and is indispensable for the attainment of a four-square understanding of existence. Literature is not a branch of study to be placed in a separate compartment, for the edifica-

tion only of scholars, but a comprehensive and artistic medium of expression to benefit the literate and the illiterate alike. A true literary composition should appeal in an infinite variety of ways; any set of stanzas of the *Ramayana* could be set to music and sung, narrated with dialogue and action and treated as the finest drama, studied analytically for an understanding of the subtleties of language and grammar, or distilled finely to yield esoteric truths.

The characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and remain valid for all time. Every story has implicit in it a philosophical or moral significance, and an underlining of the distinction between good and evil. To the storyteller and his audience the tales are so many chronicles of personalities who inhabited this world at some remote time, and whose lives are worth understanding, and hence form part of human history rather than fiction. In every story, since goodness triumphs in the end, there is no tragedy in the Greek sense; the curtain never comes down *finally* on corpses strewn about the stage. The sufferings of the meek and the saintly are temporary, even as the triumph of the demon is; everyone knows this. Everything is bound to come out right in the end; if not immediately, at least in a thousand or ten thousand years; if not in this world at least in other worlds.

Over an enormous expanse of time and space events fall into proper perspective. There is suffering because of the need to work off certain consequences, arising from one's actions, in a series of births determined by the law of Karma. The strong man of evil continues to be reckless until he is destroyed by the tempo of his own misdeeds. Evil has in it, buried subtly, the infallible seeds of its own destruction. And however frightening a demon might seem, his doom is implied in his own evil propensities—a profoundly happy and sustaining philosophy which unfailingly appeals to our people, who never question, 'How long, oh, how long, must we wait to see the downfall of evil?'

The events in Indian myths follow a calendar all their own, in which the reckoning is in thousands and tens of thousands of years, and actions range over several worlds, seen, unseen. Yet this immense measure of time and space does not add up



to much when we view it against the larger timetable of creation and dissolution. Brahma, the four-faced god and Creator of the Universe, who rests on a bed of lotus petals in a state of contemplation, and by mere willing creates everything, has his own measure of night and day. In his waking half-day he creates the Universe, which passes through four well-defined epochs, called *yugas*.<sup>\*</sup> Then Brahma falls asleep, and there is a total dissolution of everything. Brahma sleeps for twelve hours, wakes up, and the business of creation begins all over again and lasts another full cycle of four epochs.

Brahma's own life-span is a hundred celestial years,<sup>†</sup> at the end of which he himself is dissolved, and nothing is left of creation or the Creator. The sun and the stars are put out and the oceans rise in gigantic waves and close over the earth. Ultimately even the waters from this deluge evaporate and are gone. A tremendous stillness, darkness, and vacuity occur. Beyond this cosmic upheaval stands a supreme God, who is untouched by time and change, and in whose reckoning creation and dissolution have occurred in the twinkling of an eye. He is the ultimate Godhead, called Narayana, Iswara, or Mahasakti. From this Timeless Being all activity, philosophy, scripture, stories, gods and demons, heroes and epochs, emanate, and in Him everything terminates.

For certain purposes this Timeless Being descends to the practical plane in the form of a trinity of gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, each of whom has his specific function. Brahma

\* Each *yuga* lasts for 3000 years, by celestial measurements; but one celestial year is the equivalent of 3600 years of human time, so that the four *yugas* cover a span of 43,200,000 mortal years. Each of the four *yugas*, *Krita*, *Treta*, *Dwapara*, and *Kali*, possesses special characteristics of good and evil. In *Kritayuga* righteousness prevails universally. In *Tretayuga* righteousness is reduced by one quarter, but sacrifices and ceremonies are given greater emphasis. Men act with certain material and other objectives while performing the rites, no longer doing them with a sense of duty. There is a gradual decrease in austerity. In *Dwaparayuga* righteousness is diminished by half. Some men study four *Vedas*, some three, others one, and others none. Ceremonies are multiplied as goodness declines, and diseases and calamities make their appearance. In *Kaliyuga* righteousness, virtue, and goodness completely disappear. Rites and sacrifices are abandoned as mere superstitions. Anger, distress, hunger, and fear prevail, and rulers behave like highwaymen, seizing power and riches in various ways.

† The equivalent of 311,040,000,000 mortal years.



is the creator, Vishnu is the protector, and Siva is the destroyer; and all of them have important roles in mythological stories, along with a host of minor gods (whom Indra heads) and an even larger host of evil powers broadly termed demons—*asuras* and *rakshasas*; added to these are the kings and sages of this earth. The pressures exerted by these different types of beings on each other, and their complex relationships at different levels, create the incidents and patterns of our stories.

The narratives may be taken to have come down to us mostly by word of mouth, at first, and were also recorded in the course of centuries. Each tale invariably starts off when an inquiring mind asks of an enlightened one a fundamental question. The substance of the story of the *Ramayana* was narrated by the sage Narada when Valmiki (who later composed the epic) asked, 'Who is a perfect man?' Narada had heard the story from Brahma, and Brahma heard it from the Great God himself at a divine council. And so each tale goes back and further back to an ultimate narrator, who had, perhaps, been an eye-witness to the events.\* The report travels, like ripples expanding concentrically, until it reaches the storyteller in the village, by whom it is passed to the children at home, so that ninety per cent of the stories are known and appreciated and understood by every mortal in every home, whether literate or illiterate (the question does not arise).

Everyone knows what the hero achieves by God's grace, and also what the end of the demon is going to be. The tales have such inexhaustible vitality in them that people like to hear them narrated again and again, and no one has ever been known to remark in this country, 'Stop! I've heard that one before.' They are heard or read and pondered over again and again, engendering in the listener an ever-deepening understanding of life, death, and destiny.

\* Fixing the date of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, or the puranas—the source books of all legendary tales—involves one in calculations of geological rather than historical proportions. The *Vedas* are believed to have existed eternally—to have taken shape, as mentioned above, out of the breath of God; they had no beginning and will have no end. The antiquity of the puranas may be judged from the fact of their being mentioned in the *Vedas*. A certain historian of Sanskrit literature fixes the date of the *Mahabharata* at 3000 B.C., and of the *Ramayana* earlier.

Most narratives begin in a poetic setting, generally a cool grove on the banks of a river or a forest retreat, in which are assembled sages at the end of a period of fruitful penance. A visitor comes from afar. After honouring the guest, the sages will ask, 'Where are you coming from? What was noteworthy at such-and-such a king's sacrifice? Tell us whatever may be worth hearing.' And the visitor will begin his tale. Thus did Sauti, a wandering scholar, narrate the story of the *Mahabharata* at a forest retreat, when questioned by the sages. Sauti also mentions that Vyasa (the author of the *Mahabharata*) dictated the whole of it, his amanuensis being no less a personage than Ganesha, the elephant-faced god, who agreed to take down the story provided the author did not falter or pause in his narration. Vyasa accepted this condition and commenced dictating so fluently that the elephant god had to break off one of his ivory tusks and use it as a stylus for etching the text on a palmleaf. Even today the image of the elephant god is represented as possessing only a vestige of a tusk on the right-hand side of his trunk.

All the tales have certain elements in common, namely: Sages spend their lives in the forest, seeking a life of illumination through austerity and concentrated meditations (called *tapas*). Demoniocal creatures also undertake intense penance, acquire strange, unlimited powers, and harass mankind and godkind alike until a redeemer appears and puts them out. In the stories that follow, the demon Ravana, and Taraka in 'Manmatha,' are such creatures.

The kings in the tales are men of action, waging war and expanding their empires, which is their legitimate public activity. The king rules his subjects strictly according to the code of conduct set for him in the shastras. Sometimes he slips and goes through great tribulations (gambling is the weakness of the Pandavas, in 'Draupadi,' and of the hero of 'Nala'). Sometimes the king goes out hunting, strays away from his companions, and steps right into a set of circumstances which prove a turning point in his life, as in 'Harischandra' and 'Sakuntala.'

Another common element in the tales is the Swayamwara ceremony, the outstanding event in a palace, by which a princess, when she comes of age, can select a husband. Proclamations



go out far and wide that the princess is about to choose her husband. Eligible princes arrive at the capital from all directions and fill the galleries in the assembly hall. At a given moment the princess appears in the middle of the hall, bearing a flower garland, looks about, and gives it to the one she finds acceptable. Swayamwara figures with some importance in the stories 'Draupadi,' 'Valmiki,' and 'Nala.'

While the evil-minded pursue power and the acquisition of riches, there are idealists who renounce everything, including the ego, in their search for an abiding reality, as in 'Chudala' and 'Yayati.' Renunciation is ever a desirable means of attaining a higher life, and at some stage every character of goodness adopts it.

Since didacticism was never shunned, every story has implicit in it a moral value, likened to the fragrance of a well-shaped flower.

Although I have made my selection after listening to the narratives of several storytellers such as I have described, and checking them again by having the originals read out to me by a Sanskrit scholar, and although I have tried to follow closely the course of the original narratives, these stories in no sense should be taken as translations. For one thing, I have had to avoid many theological or didactic interludes that considerably help up the narrative, sometimes for two or three days, as the storyteller halted at a particular point and went off at a tangent to criticize modern attitudes or to expound a philosophy; I had to keep my focus on the sheer narrative value and omit all else, if for no other reason, to confine this volume to its present dimensions. My method has been to allow the original episodes to make their impact on my mind, as a writer, and rewrite them in my own terms, from recollection, just as I would write any of my other stories normally out of the impact of life and persons around me. In keeping with the traditional method, I have retained the narrator in the background, who occasionally comes forward with an explanation or an introduction.



